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Should the Internet be Censored?

David Chan

Just think how much our lives have changed since the emergence of the Internet! Internet users used to surf the web pages only to search for information. But now with the click of a mouse, we can gain access not only to information, but also financial services, online platforms that allow us to communicate in real time as well as different forms of infotainment and edutainment that appeal to both children and adults. The power of the Internet is vast and wondrous. We can google the information we need, send emails, share files or text messages to someone's mobile phones with just a click. It is amazing how a network connection can literally bring the world to our fingertips. No doubt, it is hard to imagine how life would be if people lived without the Net. 5

Unquestionably, the dot-commers have created a convenient platform on the Internet that enables the netizens to share information and express their views about an issue or a pop star in their blogs. It also allows people to post ads of their products or services and do business. However, not everyone follows the netiquette that people should observe and plays according to the rules of the Net, and it is also hard to guarantee that any website you visit can be 100% virus-free. Some people may abuse the Internet by spreading rumours or false information, while others set up traps and spread viruses, waiting for their prey to come. They are usually crackers (an equivalent for hackers engaging in criminal activities) and identity thieves who attempt to hack into others' computers and 'steal' their personal information or even identities. The most common trick to steal personal information is through 'phishing', in which a fake website is created and users are directed to enter sensitive information, such as passwords and credit card details. Spyware infection is also another threat to privacy as the crackers can collect information about users' browsing habits and personal information without their consent. Other cybercrimes include spamming, which involves the sending of bulk messages indiscriminately, selling of pirated products, copyright infringement, money-laundering and even illicit drug selling. All these make the Internet a hotbed for crime. 10 15 20 25

Besides a trap for people and a den for crime, the Net is also described as a place for indecent and unwanted materials, such as pornography. Though these materials are considered distasteful, many of them can be easily accessed or exchanged. Many parents are concerned about the inappropriate content that their children gain access to, for instance, pornographic articles, nude pictures, online gambling sites, offensive language and illegal drugs. According to a recent study conducted by Professor Jason Lewis of the Institute of Technology, around 75% of the young people in the interview reported that they had browsed the indecent content of some undesirable websites or encountered sexually explicit emails and pop-up advertisements online. He concludes, 'Some of the Internet content is definitely harmful to our children's minds and government censorship seems to be the best remedy.' 30 35

True, some people, like Professor Lewis, may think that the solution to this problem would be government censorship. This, however, in my opinion, is not the way out. First, censorship certainly means a violation of freedom of speech and a barrier to free trade. Punishing the rest of the country by censoring what we are allowed to do and say on the Internet would ruin the entire experience for everyone. There are many ways to block certain websites from being accessed from home and business computers. It should be left up to the individuals where they go on the information superhighway. Second, censorship is the process of blocking access to information based on what a certain group of people believe. If the Internet is to be censored, there will be an enormous amount of power granted to those who decide what should be censored. Yet, can we really trust the fate of the Internet to a few people?



Censorship means the use of government power to restrict what can be said or published.

It is believed that government censorship can reduce the number of cybercrimes considerably. However, can we possibly filter all the information from the World Wide Web, the largest archive in the world? Current estimates put the number of personal computers in the world at around one billion. Imagine the sheer volume of websites, blogs and servers that would have to be continuously checked to enforce any sort of censorship. It is certainly costly for the cybercops to patrol on the Net. Not only would this be mostly futile, but immense amounts of money and time would also be wasted.

Admittedly, the Internet opens a pathway to reach all evils around the world, so some people would think it is justified to regulate the activities and content on the Internet. The motivation for such censorship ranges from well-intentioned desires to protect children from unsuitable content to authoritarian attempts to control a nation's access to information. But the beauty of the Internet lies in its diversity of information and functions. From my point of view, instead of questioning whether censorship should be enforced, people must understand their rights and responsibilities in using the Internet. It is through self-discipline that one can truly ensure that the Internet continues to remain free.

1. Below are some views on whether the Internet should be censored. Refer to Paragraphs 4-6 and find out whose views they are by ticking the appropriate boxes.

Views		Writer's views	Others' views
a.	Internet censorship can protect our children from being exposed to indecent materials.		
b.	People should have a choice to decide what to access on the Internet.		
c.	Internet censorship is a waste of money and time.		
d.	The Internet has created many problems and therefore it is necessary to control people's use of the Internet.		
e.	Internet censorship violates freedom of speech and hinders free trade.		
f.	Internet censorship can reduce the number of cybercrimes dramatically.		
g.	Self-discipline is the solution to the problems arising from the Internet.		
h.	Internet censorship may give some people the power to control other people's right of access to information.		

2. From the information gathered above, can you tell whether the writer supports the suggestion of Internet censorship? Give reasons to support your answer.

1.

Views		Writer's views	Others' views
a.	Internet censorship can protect our children from being exposed to indecent materials.		✓
b.	People should have a choice to decide what to access on the Internet.	✓	
c.	Internet censorship is a waste of money and time.	✓	
d.	The Internet has created many problems and therefore it is necessary to control people's use of the Internet.		✓
e.	Internet censorship violates freedom of speech and hinders free trade.	✓	
f.	Internet censorship can reduce the number of cybercrimes dramatically.		✓
g.	Self-discipline is the solution to the problems arising from the Internet.	✓	
h.	Internet censorship may give some people the power to control people's right of access to information.	✓	

2. No, the writer does not support the suggestion. He does not believe that Internet censorship can solve all the problems as other people think. Instead, he believes that Internet censorship would create other issues like violation of freedom of speech and free flow of information. According to him, self-discipline is the key to the issue.

A. The English language is changing all the time. New words are invented regularly, or coined, to meet the needs of society. Words are created almost every day, particularly in the area of information technology, for example, 'Internet', 'cybercrime' and 'edutainment'. The following are some of the ways to coin new words:

1. Affixation – adding prefixes or suffixes, e.g.

- cyber + crime → cybercrime
- inter + net → Internet
- dot-com + er → dot-comm(er)

2. Blending – putting two words together and shortening them, e.g.

- Internet + etiquette → netiquette
- education + entertainment → edutainment
- web + log → blog

3. Clipping – shortening a word, e.g.

- advertisement → ad
- Internet → Net

4. Giving a new meaning to an existing word, e.g.

- mouse (a small furry animal) → mouse (a computer device)

5. Conversion – shifting the part of speech of a word without changing its form, e.g.

- Google (n) → google (v), meaning 'to find information using a search engine'

B. Understanding how a word is coined can help you remember it better. Discuss and guess the meanings of the following words. Refer to Part A and indicate the way they are invented by putting the number in the space provided. The first one has been done for you as an example.

Word	Meaning	How it is coined
surf (line 3)	to look quickly through information on the Internet for anything that interests you	4 a new meaning for the word 'surf', which originally means 'ride on a surfboard'
infotainment (line 5)		
emails (line 7)		

Word	Meaning	How it is coined
text (line 7)		
netizens (line 11)		
pop (line 11)		
virus-free (line 15)		
crackers (line 16)		
spyware (line 21)		
pirated (line 24)		
cybercops (line 50)		

- C. As new words are invented every day, some of them are so new that they may not be found in print dictionaries. However, electronic reference tools on the Internet, such as Wikis (including Wikipedia and Wikidictionary) and OneLook Dictionary, can help because the databases of these resources are often up-to-date. Look up the above words using an electronic reference tool and check whether your guesses are correct.

Word	Part of Speech	Meaning
surf (line 3)		

Word	Part of Speech	Meaning
infotainment (line 5)		
emails (line 7)		
text (line 7)		
netizens (line 11)		
pop (line 11)		
virus-free (line 15)		
crackers (line 16)		
spyware (line 21)		
pirated (line 24)		
cybercops (line 50)		

B.

Word	Meaning	How it is coined
surf (line 3)	<i>open-ended</i>	4 a new meaning for the word 'surf', which originally means 'ride on a surfboard'
infotainment (line 5)	<i>open-ended</i>	2 <i>information + entertainment</i>
emails (line 7)	<i>open-ended</i>	2 <i>electronic + mails</i>
text (line 7)	<i>open-ended</i>	5 changing the noun 'text' into a verb
netizens (line 11)	<i>open-ended</i>	2 <i>net + citizens</i>
pop (line 11)	<i>open-ended</i>	3 short form for the word 'popular'
virus-free (line 15)	<i>open-ended</i>	1 <i>virus + -free</i>
crackers (line 16)	<i>open-ended</i>	2 <i>criminal + hackers</i>
spyware (line 21)	<i>open-ended</i>	2 <i>spy + software</i>
pirated (line 24)	<i>open-ended</i>	4 a new meaning for the word 'pirate', which originally means 'sea robber'
cybercops (line 50)	<i>open-ended</i>	1 <i>cyber- + cops</i>

C.

Word	Part of Speech	Meaning
surf (line 3)	<i>v</i>	<i>to look quickly through information on the Internet for anything that interests you</i>
infotainment (line 5)	<i>n</i>	<i>television or radio programmes that deal with social issues or current affairs in an entertaining way</i>
emails (line 7)	<i>n</i>	<i>text-based messages exchanged electronically</i>
text (line 7)	<i>v</i>	<i>to send a text message to somebody</i>
netizens (line 11)	<i>n</i>	<i>Internet users</i>
pop (line 11)	<i>adj</i>	<i>popular</i>
virus-free (line 15)	<i>adj</i>	<i>free from viruses</i>
crackers (line 16)	<i>n</i>	<i>programmers who gain unauthorised access to computers, typically to do bad things</i>
spyware (line 21)	<i>n</i>	<i>a computer programme that watches what people do with their computers, and then sends that information through the Internet</i>
pirated (line 24)	<i>adj</i>	<i>copied illegally</i>
cybercops (line 50)	<i>n</i>	<i>criminal investigators of online crimes</i>

- A. Below are some cartoons about cybercrimes. What are the crimes mentioned in the cartoons? Match the cybercrimes in the table below with the cartoons by filling the appropriate letters in the boxes.

a. money-laundering	b. identify theft	c. piracy
d. spamming	e. copyright infringement	f. hacking

1.



“Oh, we used to use a crystal ball, but accessing your credit files is much more informative!”

2.



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3.



4.



“You’ve not been involved in that before, have you?”

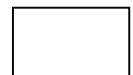
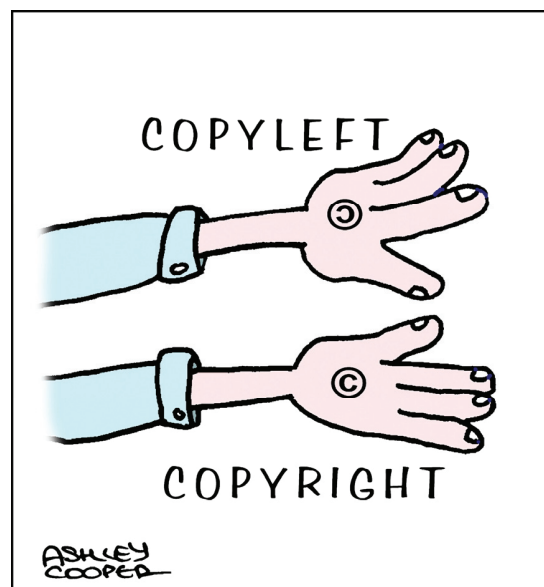
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5.



"Just in case you want to invest, I've got a great idea for a dot.com startup."

6.



B. Choose the three cartoons that you like most and share them with your group members. Explain why you like them.

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- C. One way to consolidate and expand what you have learnt about a word is to know its different forms or related words. Discuss and complete the table about cybercrimes below by filling in the names of the crimes, the people who commit the crimes and how they are done. You may consult a dictionary if necessary.

Crime	Criminal	Action
copyright infringement		
		hack
identity theft		
money-laundering		
	phisher	
		pirate
spamming		

- A. 1. f
2. d
3. b
4. a
5. c
6. e

B. open-ended

C.

Crime	Criminal	Action
copyright infringement	<i>copyright infringer</i>	<i>infringe someone's copyright</i>
<i>hacking</i>	<i>hacker</i>	hack
identity theft	<i>identity thief</i>	<i>steal someone's identity</i>
money-laundering	<i>money-launderer</i>	<i>launder money</i>
<i>phishing</i>	phisher	<i>phish</i>
<i>piracy</i>	<i>pirate</i>	pirate
spamming	<i>spammer</i>	<i>spam</i>