

CS 3001-C: Computing, Society, and Professionalism

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Week 9: Freedom of Speech
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Implications of Internet Technologies



Censorship

(Warf 2010)

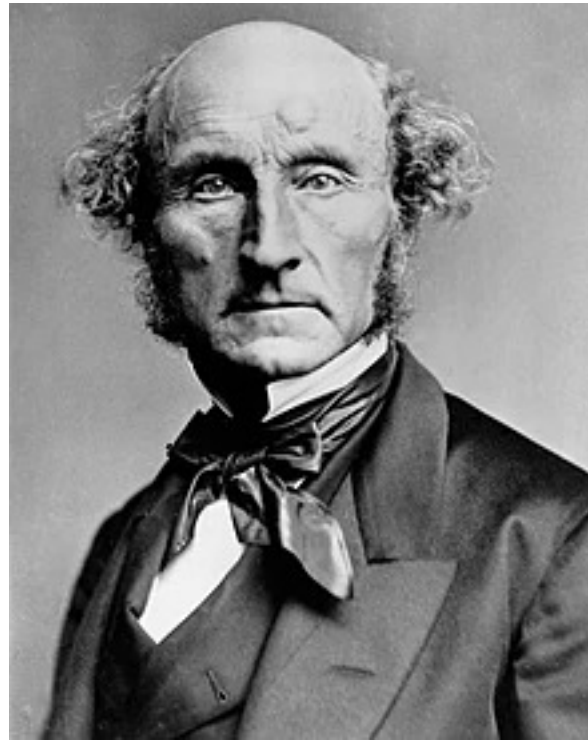
Censorship: Definition and History

- *Censorship is the attempt to suppress or regulate public access to material considered offensive or harmful*
- Forms of censorship
 - Direct censorship
 - Gov't monopoly, e.g., former USSR
 - Prepublication review; e.g., can't publish classified material
 - Licensing & registration, e.g., TV stations must comply with decency laws or lose license
 - Self-censorship
 - CNN suppressed negative reports on Iraqi gov't to keep Bagdad Bureau open
 - Publishers wanting to maintain good relationship with the government
 - Voluntary rating systems, like the mature label on games



Is Censorship Ethical?

John Stuart Mill



Kant's vs. Mill's Views on Censorship

- Radically different ethical theories, but had similar views on censorship

Kant's View

- Kant asked: “Why don't people think for themselves?”
- He replied rhetorically: “Laziness and cowardice are the reason why so great a portion of mankind, after nature has long since discharged them from external direction, nevertheless remain under lifelong tutelage, and why it is so easy for others to set themselves up as their guardians”
- Kant believed he lived in a time in which many obstacles prevented people exercising their own reason

Mill's View

- Mill championed freedom of expression
- He offered four reasons
 - Preventing someone from voicing their concern could be silencing truth
 - A person can be erroneous, but all opinions need to be heard to assess the whole truth
 - Truth needs to be rationally tested and validated
 - An opinion that has been tested through open discourse is likely to have a “vital effect on the character and conduct”

Mill's Principle of Harm

- “The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over by any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant”
- Why use of adult porn by adults should not be censored by the government



Discussion Point 1:

Does the Internet pose new challenges to censorship? How?



Platform measures



Children and Inappropriate Content



Child Internet Protection Act

Censorship and Internet

- Warf (2010) mapped the severity of censorship worldwide and assesses the numbers of people affected, and used the Freedom House index to correlate political liberty with penetration rates.
- Many governments employ filtering of or restricting access to certain Internet content
 - North Korea
 - Middle East
 - China
 - Germany
 - United States

Censorship and Internet (Warf 2010)

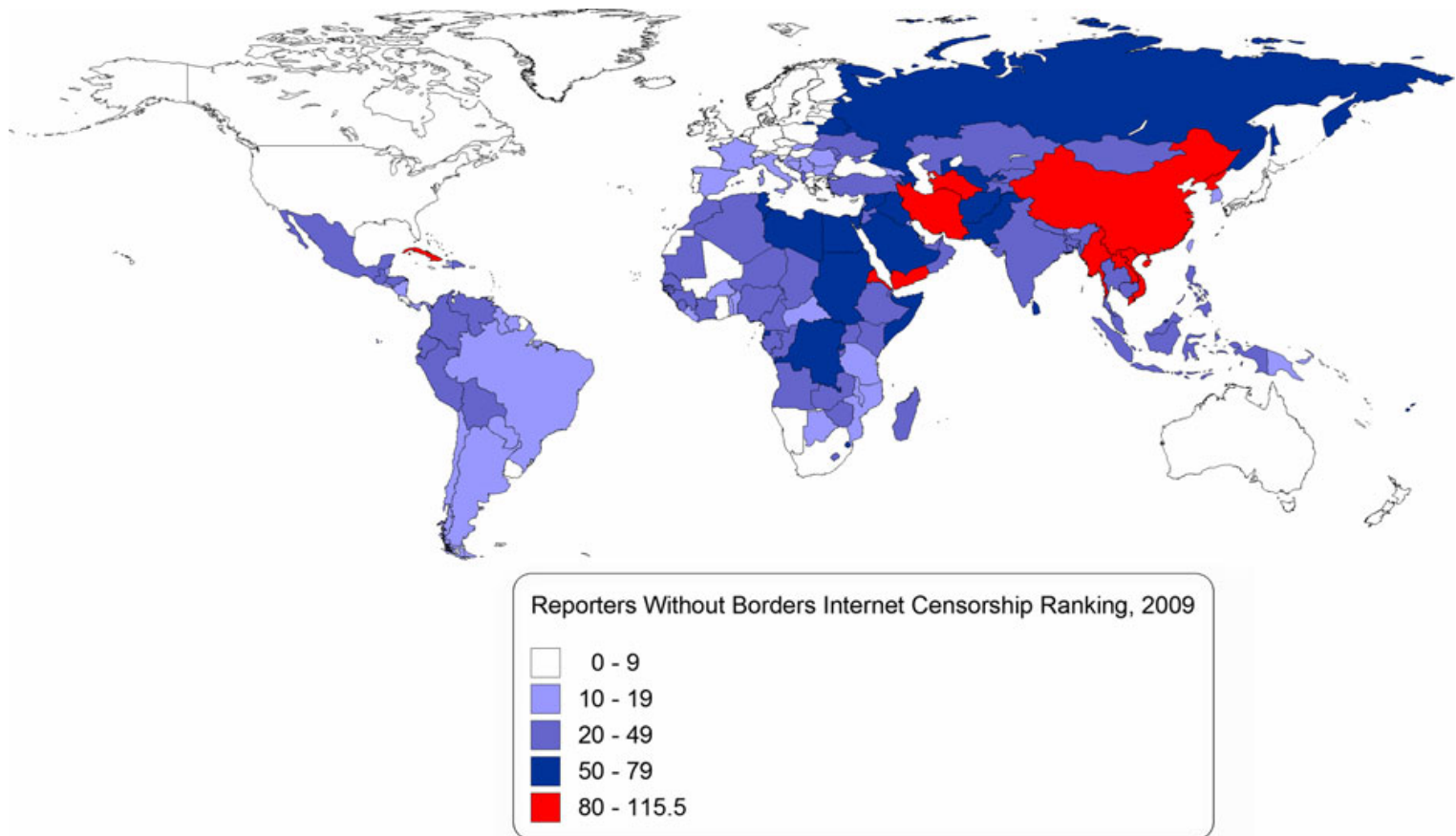


Fig. 2 Reporters Without Borders Internet Censorship Ranking 2009. *Source:* data drawn from <http://www.rsf.org/en-classes/ment1003-2009.html>



Freedom of Expression




First Amendment




First Amendment



First Amendment



Discussion point: In the US, television commercials for cigarettes are banned. Should there be a ban on commercials for violent video games too?



Discussion point: Should people publishing accusations against others on their blogs or Facebook pages be held responsible if they disseminate false information (e.g., fake news, anti-vax content, COVID-19 infodemic, Russian invasion of Ukraine)?




Spam

Spam

- What is spam?
- With ease of internet access, businesses looked for ways to capitalize on market opportunities associated with Internet communications – easier/cheaper to send emails than physical mails
 - How to find email addresses though?
 - Crawling the web; scrape address books with viruses; listen to chatroom conversations; sneaky way to sign up; dictionary attacks on ISPs
- This entrepreneurial behavior has given rise to a new set of legal and ethical problems



Spam Case Study



Discussion point: Why is “cold calling” considered to be an acceptable sales practice, but spamming isn’t?