CS 377
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Presentation Outline

“Fighting The Power! The Internet, Rebellion, And Freedom of Speech”

I. Introduction
   A. In a poll conducted by the BBC, 79% of adults expressed the belief that internet access should be a right, not a privilege. (BBC News)
   B. Internet access has become such an integral component of our lives that many cannot imagine life without it.
   C. Freedom of speech and the internet have become linked together, and it has become an integral component of our idea of free speech.
   D. This weaving of the digital world with the physical one has forever changed the nature of democracy, and those fighting for freedom.
   E. Our presentation will explore a variety of examples of this phenomenon, including the scope of internet restrictions in China, the dichotomy of activist andterroristic use of the internet by both “freedom fighters” and “terrorists” in the Middle East, and even Western attempts to regulate internet and limit net neutrality.
   F. We will begin by exploring what it means for speech to be “free”, how that relates to the internet, and just how noticeably American values have shaped the internet.

II. Body
   A. The initial ideas and foundations of the internet were put in place by the United States government, and the Western ideologies of freedom of speech have become inextricably linked with the internet itself.
      1. Free speech is a core tenet, in fact, the very first, of the United States Constitution.
         a. The internet as a communication medium is covered under this amendment.
         b. Thus, there is a lot of leeway in terms of what you can post on the internet, due to the murky global nature of servers, hosting, and international law.
         c. The recency of the internet as a medium relative to that document has us in relatively new legal territory.
      2. This means that attempts to limit internet freedom or security is met with extreme hostility, such as in the cases of the bills SOPA and CISPA.
The Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA), introduced in 2012, was met with such criticism that sites as large as Google “blacked out” their webpages.

The Cyber Intelligence Sharing and Protection Act (CISPA) is more recent, as of 2015, and has been met with similar resistance.

The problems with these controversial bills is their overbroad and potentially privacy and speech infringing attempts to prevent intellectual property theft.

Net neutrality is also a hot button issue, and internet providers like Comcast and T-Mobile have become focal points of the debate.

Comcast is infamous for its attempt to throttle down P2P traffic, the kind most often used for torrents, legal or otherwise. (Ars Technica)

T-Mobile’s “Binge On” program, while seemingly beneficial on its surface, has many internet activists bristled. (PC Magazine)

i. The plan offers preferential treatment to some sites.

ii. The question is, why do some get special treatment?

Although Americans often face questionable initiatives that could only potentially limit their internet freedom, many users already live with the reality of that limited freedom.

In the most extreme cases, there are countries like China, that have decided to control access to the Internet in its entirety, which shapes a unique breeding ground for rebellious online behavior.

China’s control over individual internet access is so pervasive that it has been coined by some as “The Great Firewall of China.” (Wired)

These controls range in variety and efficacy, from simple IP blocking all the way down to individual surveillance.

China is actively developing new ways to intervene in their citizens digital lives and build up their bank of surveillance data.

Individuals have been impugned for discussing the government in a negative light or even just talking about certain historical events.

The Tiananmen Square massacre is perhaps the most well known of these specific events.

More recently, the recent Chinese currency crash has been a popular event to censor.

Any event that is not favorable to the Chinese government gets discussion about it watched incredibly closely on the internet.
3. Because of this constant surveillance, many Chinese citizens use anonymising services like Tor to hide their identities and post their opinions about the government.
   a. Tor is essentially a “relay network” that hides the true origin of your connection, and is a key part of any dissident’s toolkit. (Tor)
   b. China is #4 for top bridge users of the Tor network, behind the U.S., Iran, and Russia. (Tor Metrics)
4. Most recently, and perhaps most frighteningly, an app was recently released in cooperation with the Chinese government that tracks one’s Chinese credit rating and online activity, allowing a person’s political leanings to affect their credit score! (Privacy Online News)
5. However, Chinese internet censorship is not just about keeping dissenting opinions down, it is also about keeping Western new sources out.
   a. This is a key part of their strategy to shape public opinion in their favor.
   b. China has even managed to scare foreign journalists who report news about it! (New Republic)

C. Perhaps the most fertile proving ground for the capabilities of the internet as a tool for free speech is none other than the Fertile Crescent itself: those Middle Eastern countries where political tensions are higher than anywhere else in the world.
   1. The most recent and relevant example that comes to mind is the Arab Spring, an upswell in demonstrations and actions against many Middle Eastern countries’ repressive governments that took place around 2011.
      a. Twitter was a key part of the movement, largely because at that time many users still utilized its SMS-based capabilities to tweet without internet access.
         i. Some users even took to changing their Twitter location to confuse local censors who were actively seeking out users to block and target in their countries.
      b. The movement was a key proving ground for the use of social media “in the field.”
         i. Despite limited access to internet, freedom of speech was in a sense elevated by technology because many protests still were able to take place because of social media communication.
   2. While there are countless numbers of people in the Middle East who have used the internet to seek democracy and transparency, there are also
terrorists who have used it to spread panic and train people in their ideology.

a. Graphic videos of beheadings have been posted and spread across the internet, like those of American journalist Steven Sotloff (CNN), simultaneous in their purpose to create fear and attract extremists.

b. More conventionally, organizations like ISIS use social media and instant messaging platforms to attract new membership. (International Business Times).

c. Internet privacy tools like Tor and Tails have also been used as internal tools by extremist organizations to organize. (Hacker OPSEC)

d. However, social media has also been a counter to the chaos caused by some terrorists, and has been used to great effect to help out those in dangers, such as during the recent Paris terrorist attacks. (The New York Times)

III. Conclusion

A. Freedom of speech, especially online, is often taken for granted in the United States, and as we have shown, there is a wide spectrum of “freedom” that people have when it comes to the internet and how they are allowed to use it.

B. We’ve walked through examples on our own home turf of craft politicians leaving bill language deliberately vague to benefit intellectual property owners and not the people at large.

C. On the other end of the extreme, we’ve shown what can happen when every action you take on the internet is watched by “Big Brother”, as is the case for the billion people in China (over 1/7th of the entire population of Earth!)

D. And lastly, we discussed how the internet and social media tools have created a new landscape in fomenting political landscapes like the Middle East, and how they’ve rewritten the rulebook for rebellion and political engagement.

E. As the Information Age we find ourselves in accelerates onward, new technologies will continue to disrupt how we express ourselves, and the increased connectivity of the internet will make that change, both technological and social, come even more rapidly.

F. In an age of keyloggers, surveillance nets, cameras, and vast banks of data, we can only hope that with better technology comes even more freedom of speech, not less.
IV. Sources Cited


<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/08_03_10_BBC_internet_poll.pdf>.


<http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2498602,00.asp>.


