

The Unstoppable Behemoth: Why the Internet Will Always Triumph Over Censorship

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From its earliest conception, the Internet was designed to be a platform of open communication, unrestricted access, and boundless exchange of ideas. As a child of the 1970s and a teenager of the 1980s, I have had the privilege of witnessing the digital revolution unfold from its infancy. My journey with computing began when I chose “The History of Computing” as the subject of my CSE coursework. That research took me back to the days of Charles Babbage, whose Analytical Engine laid the groundwork for modern computing, and through the decades where technology evolved to the interconnected world we know today.

The Internet, as envisioned by its pioneers like Tim Berners-Lee, was meant to be free for all. Berners-Lee himself famously stated, “The Web is for everyone,” emphasizing that its potential lies in unrestricted access and the democratization of information. However, in recent times, this foundational ethos has come under threat. Stories have surfaced of attempts to cancel YouTube channels or even arrest the creators, highlighting a growing concern over the erosion of free expression in the digital realm.

The Inevitability of Peer-to-Peer Communication

From the moment the World Wide Web was born, the progression toward today’s social media and peer-to-peer networks was inevitable. Humans are hardwired for connection, and the Internet’s very architecture facilitates this. Attempts to stifle free speech on these platforms are as futile as trying to hold back the tide with a sieve. Technology has always evolved faster than regulation, and for every gate the powers that be attempt to close, technology offers tools—like VPNs and the so-called “dark web”—to open new paths.

This resilience is a testament to the Internet’s design: decentralized, borderless, and inherently collaborative. Even as governments and corporations try to impose new regulations or restrictions, people will find ways to communicate, share

news, and exchange ideas at lightning speed. History has shown us time and again that censorship only fuels ingenuity.

Platform Owners Aren't Responsible for User Content

One of the most baffling trends in the ongoing debate about online speech is the attempt to hold platform owners accountable for user-generated content. This argument fails to grasp the fundamental nature of digital platforms. It's like blaming a school for graffiti on its toilet walls and demanding the institution be shut down to prevent further scribbles. The absurdity of such a stance becomes even clearer when you consider the scale of platforms like YouTube or Facebook, where billions of pieces of content are uploaded every day.

The push to “close down X” because of objectionable content is not only impractical but dangerous. By targeting platforms, we risk dismantling spaces where meaningful dialogue can occur. The high school toilet wall analogy serves as a poignant reminder: while graffiti can sometimes be offensive, erasing the wall entirely removes the opportunity to understand the environment and address the root causes.

Why Free Speech Matters

The calls to suppress speech online—even those deemed offensive or harmful—ignore a fundamental truth: free speech, including its ugly and uncomfortable forms, is better out in the open. Suppression drives dissent underground, fostering echo chambers where extreme views are amplified unchecked. When ideas are exposed to the light of day, they can be debated, challenged, and understood in context.

Efforts to censor the Internet often fail to consider the broader societal impact. History tells us that suppression only strengthens underground movements, making them harder to counteract. By allowing open dialogue, even with controversial opinions, society can confront and dismantle harmful ideologies through education and engagement.

Censorship in the Real World: Lessons from the Oxford Union

This issue extends beyond the digital realm. In recent days, the controversy surrounding the Oxford Union debating chamber being temporarily shut down—and speakers prevented from presenting their views—illustrates a growing trend of narrative control in broader society. Educational institutions, once bastions of open debate and intellectual freedom, are increasingly becoming sites of censorship.

It is worth considering whether this reflects a generational issue. Younger generations, perhaps unaware of the foundational principles of free speech championed by figures like Tim Berners-Lee, seem to prioritize safety and comfort over open discourse. This shift underscores the need to re-learn hard but essential lessons about the value of free speech. Suppressing debate does not eliminate contentious ideas; it drives them underground, where they may grow unchecked.

The Internet Is Here to Stay

Like it or not, the Internet is an unstoppable behemoth. Its ability to connect people across borders, disseminate information at unparalleled speeds, and democratize access to knowledge is unmatched in human history. Any attempt to curb its freedoms is destined to fail, not just because of the technology itself, but because of the indomitable human spirit that drives its use.

We must remember the visionaries who paved the way for this remarkable tool. Tim Berners-Lee's dream of an open, accessible Web still resonates today, a beacon for those who believe in the power of shared ideas. As we navigate the challenges of the digital age, let us remain steadfast in our commitment to keeping the Internet free and open for all. After all, the future of communication, innovation, and democracy itself depends on it.