

### Internet Freedom or Privacy

The internet began humbly, a small space for governments and scientists to communicate with each other. Today the internet is a vast frontier with seemingly endless possibilities. One can make new friends, go to school, go to their job, or plan for events with the internet. Our lives have merged with the internet, as many can't imagine life without it. With a new frontier, the internet is similar to the wild west. It has brought countless new opportunities, and to the world, it has brought numerous innovations. With new frontiers and innovations humanity creates, there come new dangers.

Large corporations like Facebook know more about us than we know about ourselves, putting us into feedback loops of misleading information. The people have opened up more governments than ever before. Malicious individuals use the internet to take advantage of people. Conversely, education has become more widely available than ever before. Thousands find creative careers on social media like Youtube and Instagram. Freedom of information is stronger than ever. Then the question comes to mind; should the internet be regulated? How should it be handled? If I were assigned to regulate the internet, my goal would be to leave it as true to the source as possible and increase individual privacy protections.

Rarely questioning the information freely provided to the internet, entire countries of individuals are at risk. Malicious governments wish they could watch every action someone does on the internet. Most everyone carries a supercomputer in their pockets which can potentially provide information on their contacts, workplace, and place of living. Several may think, "I have nothing to worry about because I have nothing to hide," and that may be true. However, not

every person has the same luxury. There are countries like China where freedom of speech doesn't exist. Advocates for human rights are putting their lives at risk every time they upload a post supporting these causes in these countries. They could lose everything. In the United States, several rights are volatile. For instance, the Supreme Court recently overturned a woman's right to abortion, allowing several states to pass strict bans which will lead to death. If a woman travels out of state for an abortion and that ends up on the internet, she may be brought to court. Blind trust in the powers that be is not sustainable, as anything can change.

Another issue people don't often consider is the sheer amount of information we are freely providing to mega corporations, which don't have our best interest in mind. Social media companies, for instance, are designed to keep someone hooked on their website. Everyone has been there, looking up from their phone after a scroll session and realizing that hours have passed. These websites are designed to be addictive; hard to put down. Instagram considers every aspect when searching for ways to stay competitive in the race for our attention. They know psychology. They know people's patterns and act accordingly. With unique digital ids for everyone, they also understand the individual's psychology. Which is what makes them so difficult to resist. One minute one is listening to a podcast about a new movie, the next, they see ads everywhere about the film, and then they decide to buy it. Is that such a bad thing? Well, it stimulates the economy vastly. However, some people want to keep their free will intact.

Lastly, there are hackers. Almost everyone knows the dangers of getting hacked on the internet. Identity theft, bank accounts, private messaging, everyone is vulnerable to these attacks. More worryingly, hackers work as hard as data companies to get into that information. Some companies have had multiple significant data breaches within the past couple of years. My grandparents were victims. The hacker had gotten into the internet, and computers, spoofed and

shut off our phones, and stole their social security numbers. They bought an apartment in Florida, and the police did nothing. I remember how scared they were; they didn't understand anything. I had to help them; manually change every password they ever had while they took care of their banking and social security info. Big Data companies store millions of terabytes of sensitive data, which can financially ruin families if broken into. All of this begs the question, why do we trust this much information on the internet? Especially if it can be stolen.

All of these issues and no guaranteed solutions. Well, as I stated earlier, I would increase privacy. It is not the individual who should be regulated, but the corporations. Starting with privacy policies, most are too long and confusing with legal jargon for people to understand where their data is being sent. There should be legal requirements for a spark notes version; no more than a few paragraphs which plainly say what information is stored, what it's being used for, and whether third-party companies have access. Secondly, the user should have more control. Companies will be required to provide opt-outs if they do not consent to specific data pulling. Companies will not be allowed to keep data for undefined amounts of time. They will state how long they keep the information or let users decide. If the user deletes their account, all information should be wiped. To protect the innocent from future breaches. One can't eliminate data saving entirely; doing so would change the internet as we know it. However, there are wiser ways to collect and store sensitive materials. Confronting these dangers is the only way to find solutions. They can't be swept under the rug anymore.