INTERNET RESTRICTION AND CENSORSHIP: TWO SIDES OF THE SAME DIGITAL COIN*

Abstract
The Internet was initially designed as an open platform for unrestricted communication and seamless information sharing. However, it soon became apparent that the internet was being misused, causing harm to society. This misuse led to the need for regulating its use and access. Consequently, two interconnected concepts emerged: internet restriction and internet censorship. These terms are often conflated, leading to imprecise legal and policy discussions. This article is an attempt to clarify the distinction between these concepts, demonstrating that while both practices limit digital freedom, internet restriction limits access to the internet, whereas internet censorship modifies content. The study employs a comparative legal and doctrinal research methodology, analyzing primary sources, i.e., legislation, court decisions, and international treaties, and secondary sources, like articles and reports. The study finds that conflating restriction with censorship weakens legal responses and digital rights advocacy. It recommends that policymakers, digital rights advocates, and legal scholars use precise terminology to improve regulatory frameworks and protect fundamental rights in the digital space. By distinguishing these concepts, the study contributes to more nuanced debates on internet governance and legal protections for online freedoms.

Keywords: internet, restriction, censorship, digital freedom, regulation.

1. Introduction

In modern-day digital governance, two key mechanisms shape internet access and content, i.e., internet restriction and internet censorship. While both concepts touch on some form of control, their purposes, intent, implementation, social effects, and digital consequences differ significantly. Scholars and policymakers often misapply these concepts, as the result of the misnomer, and treat the concepts as interchangeable phenomena. However, such generalisation obfuscates their unique legal and policy implications.[1] It is apposite to state from the onset that internet restriction refers to measures limiting or regulating access to online platforms, contents, and resources, often based on geopolitical, financial, or regulatory demands. Such measures include geo-blocking, bandwidth throttling, paywalls, algorithm suppression, content filtering, etc. On the other hand, internet censorship is a gatekeeping mechanism to ensure that unwanted content does not get to the internet, and where any such prohibited content is smuggled into the internet, it is immediately removed. Internet censorship involves the suppression, modification, or removal of content by governments, corporations, or digital platforms. Unlike restrictions, which control access, censorship determines what information remains available1. This includes blocking certain websites, filtering search results, or using algorithms to demote particular viewpoints. It is also important to state that both internet restriction and internet censorship may serve legitimate purposes such as cybersecurity, protection of public morality, order, national security, and child protection. However, available records suggest that governments often use digital control (restriction and censorship) as political tools to curtail political opposition and prevent access to dissenting opinions.[2]

Internet restriction, strictly speaking, refers to the regulation or suppression of what can be accessed, published, or viewed online. However, many writers and commentators are fond of using the phrase 'internet restriction' interchangeably with 'internet censorship'. For instance, in defining internet censorship, Vojinovic writes: 'internet censorship is the control or suppression of what can be accessed, published, or viewed online'.[3] In explaining the term 'internet censorship, Vojinovic states that internet censorship happens when a state, government, organisation, or individuals restrict or block access to web content.[4] Dictionally, the word 'restriction' means a limiting condition or measure, especially a legal one or control of someone or something, or the state of being restricted.[5] The Cambridge Dictionary is even more concise, precise, and exact: restriction simply means[6] an official limit on something,[7] or a limitation or qualification.[8] On the other hand, internet censor is an act of officially inspecting the content and, or deleting material on the internet considered offensive by the government.[9] The censorial Service provider, site controller, platform administrator, or other persons or systems that have control over the use of a particular social media, internet channel, platform, or point of access. Internet restriction deals with access to the internet or a particular website, social media, forum, platform, or apps, Internet censorship is all about monitoring and control of content, information, message, image, material, or substance that is available or accessible on the

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[1]P. Bischoff, 'Internet Censorship: A Map of Internet Censorship and Restrictions', [2025], Comparitech. https://www.comparitech.com/blog/vpn-privacy/internet-censorship-map/, Accessed January 30, 2025.

[2]A. Vigderman & G. Turner, 'Internet Censorship in 2025: The Impact of Internet Restrictions', [2024], Security.org. https://www.security .org/vpn/internet-censorship/ Accessed January 30, 2025.

[3] Ivana Vojinovic, 'Internet Censorship: Definition, Types, and How It Can Affect You', [2023], DataProt.>https://dataprot.net/articles/what-is-internet-censorship/<. Accessed January 22, 2025.

[4] *Ibid*.

[5]Oxford Dictionary online.https://www.bing.com/search?q=restrictions+meaning&qs=SC&pq=restrictions%3a+meaning&sc=8-21&cvid=F0400D4BF1A54823B22863247244DF3D&FORM=QBRE&sp=1&ghc=1&lq Accessed January 22, 2025.

[6] https://www.bing.com/search?q=restrictions+meaning&qs=SC&pq=restrictions%3a+meaning&sc=8 21&cvid=F0400D4BF1A54823B22863247244DF3D&FORM=QBRE&sp=1&ghc=1&lq=0

[7] *Ibid*.

[8] Bryan A. Garner, (ed), *Black's Law Dictionary*, (*9th Ed*) (West, 2009), 1429,

[9] *Ibid*, 253.

internet. The deduction is that there will be no need for censorship where effective restrictions are in place. Therefore, while internet restriction is often used interchangeably with internet censorship, it is necessary to correct this misuse of two different terms. The reason for term-switching is not far-fetched; both internet restriction and internet censorship in the long run can lead to the same destination: limiting access to important information and resources or preventing digital citizens from expressing their opinions and views on a given matter.[10]

The research is a doctrinal library-based study with some comparative elements, placing reliance on both primary and secondary resources from the internet. The study aims to answer the question: What are the primary differences between internet restriction and censorship? Other consequential research questions are: i. What are the means of effecting internet restriction and internet censorship? And finally, what is the correlation between internet restriction and internet censorship? The objectives of the short study are to evaluate the differences between internet restriction and internet censorship, to identify and analyze how internet restriction and internet censorship are carried out, and to deconstruct the relationship between the two concepts. This study is divided into six sections. The first section defines internet restriction and internet censorship and addresses some preliminary introductory matters. The second section discusses internet restriction as a barrier to accessing the internet and explains some technical methods often deployed by governments, states, internet providers, service providers, and the relevant authorities in achieving internet restriction and controlling access to the internet. Section three focuses on internet censorship and reviews different ways by which internet censorship is carried out and the point or level at which internet censorship is managed. Section four does a clinical comparison of internet restriction and internet censorship and concludes that internet restriction and censorship are the two sides of the same digital coin. The section five highlights some factors, i.e., cybercrimes that made it not only necessary, but mandatory to regulate access to the internet and monitoring the content of the internet. The sixth section, that last section, concludes the work and makes some suggestions to ensure that internet restriction and internet censorship are not applied by governments, authorities, and persons for selfish purposes and to gain political advantages.

It is believed that a clear understanding of the distinction between internet restriction and internet censorship is necessary for legal scholars, students, policymakers, and human rights advocates to correctly consciously develop the knowledge in the field of study, enhance the development of law that will encourage responsible use of the internet and protection of digital rights, and project digital advocacy towards the right and appropriate direction. It is the considered view of this study that while both concepts can be manipulated for authoritarian control, failing to differentiate them weakens legal arguments and advocacy efforts.

2. Internet Restriction: A Barrier to Access

Internet restriction *simpliciter* denotes deliberate measures that regulate with the intent to restrict, constrain, or block access to digital platforms such as *Facebook,*[11] *TikTok, WhatsApp,*[12] *Instagram,*[13] *X,*[14] *Telegraph,*[15] YouTube,[16] e.t.c.[17] The underlying aim of internet restriction is often intended to limit who can visit certain websites or use specific online services. Internet restriction is a form of internet shutdown described by Akeredolu and Akinsulore as any measure, factor, control, or event that prevents, interferes with, disrupts, disturbs, reduces, slows, or hinders access to the internet.[18] Basically, internet restriction deals with controlled efforts to limit or control access to the internet itself, i.e., the ability to connect to the internet or use certain online services. Generically speaking, internet restriction is aimed at controlling the availability of internet access rather than the content. This is the fundamental difference between internet restriction and internet censorship. The manifestation of internet restriction may occur in various forms, such as geo-blocking of specific apps from functioning on social media, bandwidth throttling to slow internet access, Paywalls and Subscription-Based Access, and total or partial shutdown of the internet.

Geo-blocking: Geoblocking refers to a technology that limits access to online content depending on the user's geographical location. In the realm of video streaming, this means that certain videos or services are accessible only from specific regions or countries as determined by the content provider's restrictions.[19] Geoblocking finds its application across various domains, especially in digital content distribution and regulation. In the realm of streaming services, platforms like Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime utilize geoblocking to manage regional licensing agreements. Movies and TV shows are often licensed by geographic region, and these services ensure content is accessible only within the regions for which they have secured

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[10] Paul Bischoff

[11] In nations like Nigeria where Facebook is a normal phenomenal, it would be so difficult to imagine that Facebook is banned in States like China, Russia, Myanmar, Ethiopia, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan

[12] WhatsApp is banned in Myanmar, Guinea, Oman, UAE, Qatar, Iran, Turkmenistan

[13] Instagram is highly restricted in China, Russia, Myanmar, Guinea, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan

[14] X is not allowed in China, North Korea, Russia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan.

[15] Telegraph is prohibited by governments of Guinea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Oman, UAE, Iraq, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Thailand

[16] YouTube is unlawful to access in China, Ethiopia, Guinea, Eritrea, Yemen, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan

[17] Olly Kusk, 'Understanding Censorship: Exploring Banned Social Media, Content Filtering, and Internet Access Restrictions Worldwide', [2024], Safedns. <https://blog.safedns.com/understanding-censorship-exploring-banned-social-media-content-filtering-and-internet-access-restrictions-worldwide/> Accessed February 01, 2025.

[18] O. F. Akeredolu, and A.O. Akinsulore, 'Internet Shutdown: Governmental Action,
Communication Breach and International Human Rights', [2024], 6(1), Kampala International University Law Journal (KIULJ). 299-326, 302.

[19] U. Nair, 'What is Geoblocking in Video Streaming?', [2024], Gumlet. https://www.gumlet.com/learn/geoblocking/. Accessed January, 2025.

rights. In compliance with local laws and regulations, content that is legal and culturally acceptable in one country might be offensive or illegal in another. Geoblocking helps content providers comply with local regulations, censorship laws, and cultural norms by restricting access to certain content in specific regions. Educational institutions and course providers use geoblocking to restrict access to their content, especially when they have agreements with specific countries or regions. This ensures that only students in those regions who have paid for the course or are part of an agreement can access the content.[20] No doubt, sometimes, persons in authority at home, offices, communities, and government will have to make decisions or be forced to restrict access to certain website, internet platform, social media, digital channel, or electro-media facilities for several reasons which may include the protection of family values, societal morality, religions greed, national security and restoration of public order, and to curtail the spread of hate speech, disinformation or misinformation.[21] By streamlining access and ensuring compliance with local laws, geoblocking plays a critical role in the distribution and regulation of digital content. On the other hand, geoblocking is a fundamental deprivation of access of digital citizens (netizens) to the geoblocked internet sites, platforms, and channels.

Network Throttling: Network throttling, also known as 'bandwidth throttling, is a deliberate measure by internet service providers (ISPs) to control and limit the speed or volume of data transmitted across their networks. This process can be compared to reducing the water flow from a tap.[22] The main purpose of network throttling is to prevent congestion on the network, ensuring equitable bandwidth distribution among users, particularly during peak usage times. Therefore, any intentional reduction in internet speeds for particular websites or services, often under the pretext of bandwidth management or commercial prioritization, is network throttling. Network throttling is a measure, usually implemented during peak usage times or with high-usage subscribers, that ensures equitable bandwidth distribution and may be linked to specific subscription models. Network prioritization involves categorizing different types of data traffic based on their importance within a business environment.[23] Ordinarily, network throttling is designed to ensure responsible distribution of access to internet content and equitable distribution of digital products and services online. It is sometimes used by the government and authorities to check access to the internet. Where a business consistently uploads and downloads large files, the ISP might throttle its connection speed to prevent potential lag or buffering for other users on the network.

Paywalls and Subscription-Based Access: A paywall is a digital tollgate that is used to monetize content, either completely or partially restricting users from accessing a particular website/platform or specific content, program, facility, or service within a website until payment is made. Digital paywalls serve as a price discrimination tool by categorising users based on their willingness to pay. They offer unlimited access to content for paid subscribers, while non-subscribers can only access a limited number of free articles within a specified period.[24] Paywalls are most common on subscription-based training spaces, monetised forums, and service-providing sites or platforms.[25] Some manifestations of paywall and subscription-based access are:

1. A free membership site that restricts access to certain subgroups and courses available only to premium subscribers.
2. A blog that creates a premium section by restricting some of its content to 'members only.'
3. A newspaper that requires readers to subscribe to read more than five articles.

Each of these paywalls help generate revenue by limiting access to exclusive content.[26] There are three types of paywalls: soft, hard, and metered. A soft paywall allows users to sample content and provides the option to subscribe to access premium parts of a product or service. In contrast, a hard paywall completely restricts access to content until a purchase is made, often making it harder to sell due to the lack of a 'free trial' effect. A metered paywall permits access to content for a set period or a certain number of uses before requiring payment, typically resetting monthly.[27] A dynamic paywall leverages advanced algorithmic technology to analyze a reader's browsing habits and patterns, allowing for customized access. This adaptive paywall can evolve based on changes in a user's interests, behaviors, or patterns, making adjustments to convert them into subscribers whenever possible.[28] It has been argued that paywalls are essential in the digital world for several reasons. They encourage the creation of high-quality content, ensure that creators receive fair compensation, and help maintain editorial integrity. Although they can present challenges for users, paywalls ultimately support a vibrant and sustainable online ecosystem.[29] While legal in commercial settings, some governments use this tactic to limit public access to important information.

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[20] *Ibid*.

[21] O. F. Akeredolu, and A.O. Akinsulore, 'Internet Shutdown: Governmental Action,
Communication Breach and International Human Rights', [2024], 6(1), Kampala International University Law Journal (KIULJ). 299-326, 301.

[22] M. Bartley, 'Everything You Need To Know About Network Throttling', [2023]. Haptic. https://www.haptic-networks.com/wifi/network-throttling/. Accessed January 3, 2025.

[23] Nair, *op.cit*.

[24] P. S. Dhillon, A. Panda, and L. Hemphill, 'How Digital Paywalls Shape News Coverage', [2025], 4(1), *PNAS Nexus*, 1-5, 1.

[25] Mighty Team, 'Monetization: What Is a Paywall? Everything You Need to Know for 2025'. <What Is a Paywall? (Everything You Need to Know for 2025) | Mighty Networks> Accessed February 01, 2025.

[26] Mighty Team, *op.cit*.

[27] *Ibid*.

[28] S. MacDonald, 'What is a Paywall?', [2025], Squarespace. <https://www.squarespace.com/blog/what-is-a-paywall>

[29] Si Willmore, 'What is a paywall? Types and case studies', [2025]. Memberful. <https://memberful.com/blog/paywall/>

State-Imposed Website Restrictions: State-imposed website restrictions, bans, internet closing, and internet shutdowns are governmental disruptions of their countries' network connection and social media access. Government-imposed internet restrictions, regardless of the reasons provided, severely limit freedom of expression and the right to access information.[30] These actions are typically not permissible under international human rights law.[31] Everywhere internet restriction is imposed by the State, the governmental justification is always on the grounds of national security or public morality.[32] However, no matter the justification adduced by the governments for internet restriction, it is imperative for the States to understand that they have an international duty and obligation to respect, protect, and promote the same rights netizens have online as offline. This includes, in particular, freedom of expression and information, which are regarded as the touchstones of all human rights,[33] regardless of frontiers and through any media of one's choice.[34] Therefore, States must uphold the same rights online as they do offline. This responsibility notably includes ensuring freedom of expression, applicable across borders and through any media chosen by individuals, as stipulated in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).[35] While internet restrictions are sometimes necessary for the preservation of morality, policy and values, national security, cybersecurity, and regulatory compliance, they are frequently abused to prevent access to politically sensitive information.

3. Internet Censorship: A Control over Content
Internet censorship refers to the deliberate efforts by governments, authorities, parents, system, e.t.c., designed to control, suppress, or manipulate online content or suppress the content available on the internet. Also known as content moderation, internet censorship refers to the banning or deletion of speech, writing, or images that are considered to be indecent, obscene, or otherwise objectionable.[36] The internet censor aims to ensure that objectionable content is not available or is strictly regulated by certain criteria. Unlike restriction, which controls access, censorship alters the digital landscape by deciding what information is available. In other words, Internet censorship involves the suppression or prohibition of specific online content, often making it illegal and virtually inaccessible within the jurisdiction of the regulating authority. In some cases, even the publication of censored material is considered an unlawful act that attracts criminal liability.[37] Censorship is not limited to government actions, it can also occur in private settings, including homes and workplaces, and through restrictions imposed by Internet Service Providers (ISPs). The nature and extent of internet censorship varies depending on its source, taking different forms based on the controlling entity and its objectives.[38] There are different means of controlling and censoring of the internet.[39]

Government Censorship: One of the fundamental duties of the government is to ensure peace, order, and good government within the geo-political enclave of the nation. This duty empowers the government to regulate information that is available in the public space. The right to censor content on the internet derives from this governmental duty.[40] Content moderation is a necessary part of the online world. Governments of nations all over the world have developed diverse ways of regulating the content of the internet through censoring and expurgating unwanted content from the internet. Content available on the internet may be regulated by laws made by the legislature,[41] executive orders, government policies, collateral censorship agreements.[42] The governments sometimes without direct control, may exercise indirect influence over publishers, broadcasters, and journalists through law and regulations.[43] The turning point in what could be termed free internet was the passage of the Communications Decency Act (CDA) in 1996, by the U.S.[44] Congress. CDA Act was enacted in response to growing concerns regarding minors' exposure to pornography on the Internet. This Act marked the first significant effort by Congress to impose regulations on indecent, obscene, or pornographic content accessible online.

Corporate Censorship: Corporate censorship refers to corporate bodies' systems used to block words, images, or ideas from being read, heard, or seen in the corporate internet environment. It also means a corporate protocol put in place by non-governmental bodies for reviewing something and choosing to remove or hide parts considered unacceptable by the company's policy.[45] Social media companies and search engines moderate content based on corporate policies, often

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[30] Alfred Mavedzenge, *Legal Guidance on Internet Restrictions and Shutdowns in Africa*, (International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), 2022), 3.

[31] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR).

[32] Recourse is always made to the provisions of Article 19(3) of ICCPR.

[33] *Mortada Mansour v. Al-Youm Al-Sabea Website, (2014),* Case No. 73228/67, Court of Administrative Judiciary, Egypt.

[34] Article 19, Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

[35] Mavedzenge, *op.cit*. 6.

[36] Cyd Oldham (Edt.), Censorship, [2016], *Legal Dictionary*. https://legaldictionary.net/censorship/ Accessed February 8, 2025.

[37] Aliza Vigderman and Gabe Turner, 'Internet Censorship in 2025: The Impact of Internet Restrictions', [2024], Security.Org. <https://www.security.org/vpn/internet-censorship/#around-the-world>

[38] *Ibid*.

[39] Jennifer Cobbe, 'Algorithmic Censorship by Social Platforms: Power and Resistance', [2022], *Springer*, 739–766, 732.

[40] *Ibid*. 761

[41] Nigerian's Cybercrime (Prohibition Prevention etc.) Act 2015, South African's Films and Publications Amendment (FPA) Act, 2023, Australian Online Safety Act, 2021 (as amended), the United Kingdom's Communications Act, 2003,

[42] A system of censorship through Internet intermediaries and other, owners of digital infrastructure, organizer, promoter, owne rs, or agencies of social media platforms, internet platform and channel and corporate that supply information and content to the internet.

[43] Jack M. Balkin, 'Old-School/New-School Speech Regulation', [2014], 127:2296, *Harvard Law Review*, 2296-2342, 2308

[44] Communications Decency Act 1996, 47 U.S.C. § 230(c)

[45] Charla Viera, 'Impacts of Censorship in the Workplace', [2023], *Aje*.<https://www.aje.com/arc/impacts-of-censorship-in-the-workplace/>. Accessed February 08, 2023.

influenced by financial or political interests. To safeguard company resources and prevent the mistreatment of individuals, organizations and institutions impose restrictions on internet and social media access. This practice ensures that employees remain focused on work-related tasks and avoid sharing inappropriate content. Additionally, these policies aim to curb internal gossip, slander, and bullying within the workplace.[46]

Algorithmic Suppression: Algorithmic censorship involves the use of automated systems and algorithms by online platforms and authorities to regulate, filter, or restrict the spread of information on the internet. It employs computational methods to control information flow, extending beyond traditional censorship by relying on automated decision-making processes that influence content visibility. These algorithms are programmed to identify, amplify, or suppress specific content based on predefined criteria, thereby affecting various forms of online communication.[47] Platforms use artificial intelligence to reduce visibility, demonetise, or de-rank specific content. Algorithms are designed to detect and either promote or suppress specific content based on predefined criteria. Algorithmic censorship can influence various types of online content, including news articles, social media posts, and videos. It has been argued that this form of censorship can have a significant impact on freedom of expression, access to information, and public discourse. Social media platforms utilize algorithms to curate users' content feeds, thereby shaping what they see and engage with. These algorithms often prioritize content based on user behavior, engagement trends, and platform policies. As a result, algorithmic censorship can create a selective and potentially biased representation of information, influencing users' perceptions. This process may also contribute to the formation of 'filter bubbles,' where individuals are exposed to a narrow and repetitive range of viewpoints.[48]

Content Filtering: Content filtering is a systemic prevention of curtained identified content, defined topics, specified information, or particular data from appearing on search engines or online forums. Content filtering is a technique used to regulate or restrict access to certain emails or web pages, primarily to prevent exposure to harmful content. Organizations frequently deploy content filtering programs to manage access through their firewalls, while individual users may also utilize them for personal security.[49] This process can be implemented through hardware or software and is often integrated into internet firewalls to control information access. Businesses employ content filtering tools to enhance cybersecurity and enforce corporate policies on information management, such as restricting access to social networking sites. Content filters enable organizations to restrict access to websites known for distributing malware, thereby safeguarding their data and users from harmful activities. For instance, Domain Name System (DNS) filtering helps mitigate the risk of internet-based malware attacks while minimizing the time and effort required for remediation if a breach occurs. Additionally, firewalls equipped with content filtering capabilities can analyze and inspect web pages to detect potential threats. Censorship does not necessarily restrict users' access to the internet but instead controls what they see and engage with.

4. Internet Restriction and Censorship, the Two Sides of the Same Digital Coins

Internet restrictions and internet censorship, while closely related, are distinct socio-digital concepts. The two concepts are deployed or employed in different facets and levels of the same phenomenon to clog the wheel of information flow on the internet. Internet restriction is the janitor of the internet, internet censorship is the monitor of the information on the internet. The two concepts are the head and tail of the same coin. Although these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, they represent different concepts with unique regulatory implications for society.[50] Internet restrictions limit lawful access to online services and resources, whether by government entities or non-governmental bodies, based on legal provisions, policies, public morality, corporate security considerations, parental controls, or social responsibilities. Internet restrictions are implemented for various reasons, including reducing network congestion, managing bandwidth usage, preventing children from accessing inappropriate content, restricting certain websites to enhance productivity and security, and upholding public morality, peace, order, and security.[51] Internet restrictions are imposed at the entry point of the internet or the login point of an internet forum, platform, channel, panel, dashboard, portal, or other social media gateway. On the other hand, internet censorship fundamentally involves the intentional suppression or regulation of specific content, information, ideas, or forms of expression. This is typically enacted by governments, corporate bodies and corporations, parents, and authoritative bodies assigned with the duty to control the narrative and restrict what netizens can access or learn on the internet. In contrast, restrictions are broader limitations or regulations that can be applied to various areas of digital life, including online freedom of speech, digital press, or general internet usage. Although both censorship and restrictions limit information at a given point in the information flow, the primary difference lies in the underlying purpose, point of imposition, and degree of enforceability.[52] It has been argued that Internet restrictions and censorship are intricate and multifaceted elements of the digital age that play important roles in safeguarding national or sectional security, enforcing legal standards, ensuring service quality, protecting public morality, and ensuring human rights protection and netizens'

[46] *Ibid.*

[47] Ravale Mohydin, 'Algorithmic Censorship and Israel's War on Gaza' [2023], *TRT World Research Centre.* https://researchcentre. trtworld.com/policy-outlooks/algorithmic-censorship-and-israels-war-on-gaza/ Accessed Feburary 08, 2025.

[48] *Ibid.*

[49] Fortinet, 'Content Filtering: Definition', [2023]. https://www.fortinet.com/resources/cyberglossary/content-filtering. Accessed February 09, 2025.

[50] Mediavine, 'Understanding the Difference: Censorship vs. Restrictions', [2025], Differencess.https://differencess.com/difference-between-censorship-and-restrictions/?form=MG0AV3 Accessed February 09, 2025.

[51] Mediavine, 'Understanding the Difference: Censorship vs. Restrictions', [2025], Differencess.https://differencess.com/difference-between-censorship-and-restrictions/?form=MG0AV3 Accessed February 09, 2025.

[52] *Ibid.*

psychosocial well-being online. However, they also spark debates over individual freedoms, privacy, access to information, and internet presence.[53]A clear understanding of the reasons behind these restrictions and censorship will enable users, policymakers, corporate boards, industry professionals, researchers, commentators, and human rights activists to navigate the complexities of the online space. A clear understanding of the twin concepts of internet restrictions and internet censorship encourages informed discussions and informed decisions and stimulates responsible life and ethical internet usage. Through the conscionable imposition of internet restriction and censor, when necessary, a delicate balance is ensured between lawful regulation and accountable open access to life online. Although internet restrictions and internet censorship are two different, distinct digital concepts with different outlooks, they have the same fundamental outcome: they both limit access to information and curtail freedom of expression online. The right to freedom of opinion and expression, which embodies the right to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive,[54] and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers, is a right guaranteed by international Law.[55] The rights to freedom of information and expression are not absolute and carry with them special duties and responsibilities. Therefore, rights are subject to municipal policy, national law, corporate interest protection, and parental control that are necessary for respect of the rights or reputation of others and the protection of national security, of public order, or public health or morals.[56] It therefore follows that internet restrictions are only legal if prescribed by law and for the protection of national security or public order. By the same international law token, internet censorship is necessary and mandatory to be proportionate and applied to achieve a legitimate aim prescribed by law, public policy, morality, and health.[57]

5. Cybercrimes, Internet restrictions and Content Censorship

The main purposes of regulating internet access and content control are to prevent online crimes and warrant minimum morality online by ensuring that only safe and non-toxic content is available online. Internet crimes (cybercrimes) such as spreading falsehood, hate speech, phishing, internet fraud, cyber-attack, online identity theft, cyberbullying, and child sexual exploitation have become international crimes of global concern.[58] The concerns raised by the colossal and rapid growth in reports of cybercrimes and attendant negatives effects on the sanity of the internet and the sanctity of life online born the regulatory system consisting of internet restriction and internet censorship. Where there is crime, there must be, of necessity, a 'code of conduct' to serve as a legal cleanser of the environment. It has been observed that minors in States or communities with the lowest online presence are the least likely to be cyberbullied or fall victim to crimes originating from the internet, such as cyberbullying, sexual exploitation, internet fraud, identity theft, and misinformation. Japan has been proven to be the country where children are least exposed to various online threats because of the Japanese strict internet regulation, access restriction, and stringent censorship of internet content. Italy, Spain, Ecuador, and India are examples of rigorous internet restrictions and internet censorship with attendant low cybercrime risk factors.[59] Conversely, cybercrimes are lower in nations where access to the internet environment is heavily policed and information online is sternly monitored. In Nigeria, for instance, unhindered access to the internet, highly unregulated information service providers, and an uncensored content policy have been suggested to be responsible for the high cybercrime rate.[60] Sincere internet regulations are designed and put in place to uphold internet integrity, deter online crimes, and ensure the safety of internet users internationally and domestically. Hence, it is necessary to regulate internet access and control the content available on the internet to protect the wholeness of the national cyberspace and maintain the healthfulness of the internet atmosphere. It is important to regulate the internet through a fair legal framework within the limitations endorsed by international human rights law to create enabling environment within the national cyberspace that will support e-business and social interaction. In a free and democratic nation, however, citizens' international right to express themselves civilly should not be undermined under any social guise or legal pretense.[61] In all, internet regulations must be transparent and fair without compromising the digital rights of citizens.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Though internet restrictions and internet censorship both restrict digital freedom, they do it differently: restrictions control access, but censorship redefines content. Knowing the distinction is important to creating legal protection, regulatory regulation, and advocacy movements. Even when restrictions are necessary, both activities violate international human rights to freedom of expression and access to information when employed to silence dissent and control public discourse. With an understanding of the differences between these types of internet controls, legal experts and advocates of digital

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[53]Hongkong Lingyun, 'Understanding Online Restrictions: Causes, Implications, and Mechanisms', [2023], IP2 World. https://www.ip2 world.com/blog/understanding-online-restrictions-causes-implications-and-mechanisms.html#:~:text=Understanding%20Online%20 Restrictions%3A%20Causes%2C%20Implications%2C%20and%20Mechanisms%201,...%204%204.%20Bandwidth%20Management %20and%20Quality%20Control%3A.> Accessed February 09, 2025.

[54] Wholegrain Digital, 'The Right to Freedom of Expression Under International Law: Freedom of Expression Under International Law', [2023], Media Defence.https://www.mediadefence.org/ereader/publications/introductory-modules-on-digital-rights-and-freedom-of-expression-online/module-1-key-principles-of-international-law-and-freedom-of-expression/the-right-to-freedom-of-expression-under-international-law/ Accessed February 09, 2025.

[55] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Art. 19.

[56] Ibid, Art 19(3)

[57] *Ogwuche v. Federal Republic of Nigeria*, (2018), ECW/CCJ/JUD/31/18

[58] Surfshark: 'Children and Online Risks: Global Statistics'. https://surfshark.com/research/cybersecurity-for-kids/statistics. Accessed 28 February, 2025.

[59] *Ibid*.

[60] Olujobi, Olusola Joshua, 'Analysis of the Legal Frameworks for Combating Cyber Crimes: A Tool for Economic Development in Nigeria', [2021] 2 (1), *KWASU Law Journal*, 116-140, 132

[61] Joshua Uba, 'Curbing Internet Crimes in Nigeria: Need for the Restoration of Internet Integrity', [2024]: 18(1), JILCLI. 52 − 59, 54.

rights can develop better models for the protection of freedom of expression, access to information, and digital democracy. There is a need to develop international soft law and regulatory guidelines with which national cyber-related laws must comply in setting minimum standards for municipal laws in regulating internet access to uphold national internet regulation integrity. Such international standards will serve as the scale from which the lawfulness of national legal framework. Internet restrictions must be focused on preventing criminals from getting access to the internet and all materials suspected to have the capacity to encourage cybercrimes and contain instructions for crimes, and disturbing extremist content must be at all-times censored and immediately removed. Internet restrictions and internet censorship must not be based on religion, race, personal conviction, or any other divisive factors but must be based on legal principles and defined national interests. All the stakeholders and key players in the area of internet regulation, i.e., government officials, government agencies, service providers, Courts, and legislators must be trained and educated on how to differentiate between access control and content censorship to establish a just and effective regulatory system. Internet regulations must be just, transparent, and reflect a balance of national security, internet integrity, and public policy concerns with digital rights when preparing internet governance regulations and laws.