

The shift from traditional to new media has made censorship more complex

Censorship controls what individuals and society have access to within the media. Defined as the “suspension or prohibition of media that are considered unacceptable, inappropriate or a threat” (i) censorship has a necessary and sometimes detrimental role within the media. Censorship is a process that attempts to safeguard the content that is available online. But as the shift from traditional to new media continues to evolve at a rapid rate, the role of censorship has been significantly impacted. Traditional media, described as “channels that have been used for decades” (ii), used cinema, free to air and cable networks to release film and TV content, where censorship legislation guided a controlled ratings system. Whereas new media, outlined as “mass communication using digital technologies” (iii), uses digital services such as Video Streaming on Demand (VSOD) and social media channels to release film, TV and user generated content. New media has created platforms that are easily accessed, convenient, quick and often private to the individual user. Users can demand content with little control over the rating of the content. New media is now embedded in society, causing a paradigm shift in where and how we source our media and content. There has been an explosion of mass quantity and access, and Censors globally are now challenged at controlling the content to make sure it meets national legislation.

Brief paragraph exploring how and why a shift from traditional to new media has occurred eg: developments in technology, has been omitted.

Until the 1990's, traditional media adhered to rules, guidelines and legislation. This created a one-way linear system where all content had to be carefully watched/looked at and filtered in order to be released to the public. In a Western setting, The Hays Code and The Office of Censorship in America, or our Office of Film and Literature Classification in New Zealand, are types of guidelines or bodies that have contributed to the linear process. This process ensured that traditional media was created with awareness of each rating's requirements, fitting the national legislation for a particular country. Censorship legislation acted as a 'gatekeeper' controlling the production process, making traditional media adhere to legal requirements before release. This has changed in the past 30 years as the internet and new media has become prevalent. Formally produced content, released via VSOD must comply with national censorship legislation, however controlling who sees or accesses the content is complex. In comparison, social media provides open access and availability. With platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Reddit, Youtube and TikTok, mass quantities of user created content provides an abundance of media and content right at our fingertips. This presents several complications when trying to ensure content satisfies censorship legislation.

Mass digital media is difficult to censor. With more than 31 million active channels on YouTube, there is so much content being produced, and watched with over 1.15 billion views recorded per day (iv). 500 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute creating a content overload that national censors can't keep up with. It therefore becomes a corporate responsibility, with Youtube applying computer-generated algorithms to identify explicit and/or offensive content. In the first half of 2021, Youtube identified and removed 120,000 videos containing instances of child harm/exploitative content from its site (v). Sophisticated Artificial Intelligence (AI) is used to identify harmful content, however users are still able to access explicit content that would otherwise be regulated if it was traditional media. Younger users are able to log into anyone's account who is of age and access this content and creators are able to find loopholes, such as blurring out a certain portion of a video. This isn't only reflected in YouTube, but also across other social media as the rapid pace of content creation and release has made it extremely hard to keep up, not only as a viewer but also as a censor. This allows inappropriate and potentially harmful content to pass through avoiding national legislation about censorship. It downgrades the quality of censorship and what gets censored.

Paragraph on censorship laws in China, Iran and North Korea omitted.

The prolific nature of new media has challenged governments to consider how they can regulate the moderation of social media platforms and streaming services to keep users safe. There are significant social implications caused by the uncontrolled flow of online content via social media. Each platform uses a combination of AI and human intelligence to moderate its content (vi). This process, which Youtube states has become more accurate, quickly identifies harmful content, with the removal of 83

million inappropriate videos in three years. However, both content moderators and users of the platforms are still exposed to horrifically violent content that would otherwise be strictly controlled if released through traditional media. A lack of censorship can be harmful as people are exposed to inappropriate content, some at a young age, promoting new norms for violence, which has wider social implications. Exposure to harmful content is not limited to social media, as anyone can access VSOD services, where a ratings system that reflects the country of usage should be included. Streamed TV and film content reflects national censorship legislation in New Zealand, however users of any age can access R16 and R18 content unless strictly controlled by a guardian or parent. The increase of smartphone ownership amongst youth often makes viewing streamed TV and films a solitary activity, with parents having little/no understanding of the rating of the content their child is exposed to. Netflix has recently included a 'maturity' rating which provides additional content information about potential triggers. However, VSOD providers are not legally obligated to provide anything other than a rating that reflects local legislation and this law only came into place in New Zealand in 2021.

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Paragraph on the wider implications of harmful content on youth audiences and the role of parental control omitted.

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The issue of controlling content in new forms of media raises ideological challenges. Society and parents rely on regulation and laws to maintain social order and reflect our cultural beliefs. But the rapid development of new media forms that generate hard-to-moderate content challenge traditional methods. No laws, acts or rules can currently maintain or keep up with the internet and its fast-growing pace. This forces governments into a difficult position where they become reliant on large global corporations to follow rules and in some instances, enforce social order. Netflix, in response to recent New Zealand legislation, is now a schedule 4 VSOD provider who is legally required to update their ratings to align with the NZ classifications system^(vii). The Films, Video and Publications Act 1993 has recently been updated "to allow for urgent prevention and mitigation of harms caused by objectionable publications."^{viii} . Prior to the changes to this act, VSOD providers could have chosen to align their ratings to reflect the culture and laws of the country the content was streaming in, however none chose to do so. Additionally, the responsibility for monitoring harmful content still relies on the corporations that control the technology, and the community of users that participate in them. This places significant social responsibility in the hands of a few: Meta (owners of Facebook, Instagram and others), Advance Publications (owners of magazines and Reddit) and Google (owners of Youtube). Seventy percent of US adults believe social media conglomerates hold too much power and that more regulation of them is needed.^{ix} However, US based regulation does not have any impact on the actions of either VSOD or social media providers, as they operate globally across many jurisdictions. Additionally, small countries like New Zealand are unlikely to dictate or influence major change in global corporations that control much of new media, leaving us at their mercy. Ultimately, media platforms do have power to control and censor what creators are doing online. But many argue that they aren't censoring creators, "because ultimately there is a profit motive for social media companies to spread "high engagement" content even when it is offensive".^x Companies are driven by responsibilities to shareholders, rather than a social responsibility to do what is morally and ethically correct.

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Paragraph removed on a discussion of freedom vs regulation in the US, along with a case study about the use of social media in the Trump administration during the Capitol Riots.

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The shift from traditional to new media has created an uncertain future for censorship. Identifying where the line sits between whose responsibility it is to ensure explicit or harmful materials are censored, is complicated. Legislation developed at a national level provides a legal framework. However, it is difficult to enforce legislation when content creation evolves so rapidly. The difference between publication (traditional media) and platform (new media) creates a blurry line around where responsibility sits for controlling content. Stricter control and censorship, such as those used in China, Iran and North Korea are possible however state control at that level reaches beyond film, TV and online content into other areas of society. In New Zealand, we value freedom too much to introduce strict censorship controls. Further advances in technology and better education may enable users to act as gatekeepers to control the content they see online, with the public working to moderate content for our own best interest. Our expectation of immediate publication limits the viability of censorship or regulation prior to posting. Therefore, controlling content in traditional ways in the face of technology that evolves rapidly is complicated.

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Bibliography omitted, footnotes not shown