



Governing Internet Expression

The International and Transnational Politics of Freedom of Expression

Benjamin Wagner

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Abstract

Why should anyone care about freedom of expression? Why does it matter that individuals have the ability to speak their mind uninhibited? What inherent value can be found in the seeking, receiving and imparting of information that would cause any society to raise it to the level of a human right? And why should the story and its subsequent narration in modern liberal thought raise the value of free expression to a value worth dying for? Why does speech matter?

This thesis explores the governance of freedom of expression on the Internet. It focuses on liberal democracies and global corporations in North America and Europe, analysing governance practices rather than norms or discourses. The thesis also studies developments in Internet technology, which it is argued increase the disciplinary capacity of technical Internet architecture.

The thesis suggests that the Internet has seen the rise of innovative governance practices that influence how the Internet is regulated. From contesting code to algorithmic regulation and quasi-public NGOs, many novel governance practices can be observed by studying how the Internet is governed. Indeed it can be argued that Internet Governance is itself a forum for international regulatory debates on the nature of appropriate regulation in a globalized world.

Finally, an argument is developed which suggests that a "global default" of Internet speech restriction has developed in the last two decades. This global default is at the core of many disagreements in Global Internet Governance, but at the same time can only be understood in an international context. That such a system could even be developed internationally has required specific forms of global governance, termed here "legitimacy theatre." This phenomenon serves to ensure weak institutionalization and minimal state involvement while enabling extensive coordination between private actors. These factors all contribute to creating the Internet as we know it today and help in understanding what can be said – and what is hidden or excluded – from the most important human communications platform.



Jury: Kavé Salamatian (Université de Savoie), Juan Carlos De Martin (Nexa Center for Internet and Society, Politecnico di Torino), Benjamin Wagner (candidate), Sven Steinmo (EUI) (Supervisor), Alexander H. Trechsel (EUI)

Bio

Ben Wagner is a post-doctoral research fellow at The Annenberg School for Communication at University of Pennsylvania and has completed a PhD in Political and Social Sciences at European University Institute in Florence. His PhD focuses on the globalized governance of freedom of expression on the Internet, while his research interests extend to digital foreign policy, human rights, privacy and surveillance in the Middle East, Europe and North America. His research has been published in *Politics*, *Telecommunications Policy*, *JTIP* and the *International Journal of Communications* and he has authored reports for the European Parliament and UNESCO.

Ben was previously a Visiting Fellow at Humboldt University in Berlin, the European Council on Foreign Relations and Human Rights Watch. He holds an M.A. in Political Science, International Law and Statistics from LMU University Munich and an M.Sc. in International Development Administration from the Universiteit Leiden.