# VareseNews

## Censorship on the Internet is difficult and unnatural

**Pubblicato:** Venerdì 18 Dicembre 2009

The idea of filtering web contents, by restricting access to some websites, is nothing new. It is not even necessary to quote extreme situations like China or Iran; established democracies have also applied (or would like to apply) some kinds of content filtering.

The latest proposal came from Australia, just last Monday; apparently, the government is planning to create a national filter, which will come into force in 2011, to block access to some illegal websites. The government hopes to limit access, not so much to political or violent contents, but to websites containing child pornography, and those dedicated to piracy.
 However, Internet censorship is not only ethically complex (because it limits the freedom of expression), but also technologically difficult. Just two years ago, the first filter created by the Australian government collapsed miserably.

The very nature of the Internet makes filtering difficult; if particular contents cannot be accessed one way, the web will try to provide it other ways. Even the spread of social networks, which allow the sharing of contents among users that live in different countries (and under different legislations), makes the creation of virtual walls technologically difficult. It is no accident that the world's dictatorships have had to reach agreements with the Internet giants, such as **Google and Microsoft**, to block access to contents. Moreover, many Italian users know how easy it is to bypass the regional restrictions in order to watch, for example, films on websites that own the copyrights only for one particular country. And mobile phones make this situation even more complicated: just consider the images that we received of the recent clashes in Iran, thanks to the mobile networks and new generation mobile phones.
Then, if we consider the technological battle to be difficult (if not lost before it starts), the widespread idea is that sensitivity and education should govern life on the Internet. Today, the Italian newspaper, "la Repubblica", has published an interesting opinion of Dan Gillmor, the blogger and writer. Gillmor says "I'm always very dubious when I hear that a government is trying to limit the freedom of expression. I live in a country where people have died to enable others to express opinions that oppose theirs."
Gillmor's opinion is in line with that of many Italian, and non-Italian bloggers. The risk is that censorship will lead to a new revolt, in defence of the freedom of expression. An interesting comment was made by Beppe Severgnini, who thinks "we don't need other rules for the Internet". Even the founders of Facebook, the website that contains most

of the controversial material about the Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, answered with an official statement. "The fact that some comments and contents may irritate, such as the criticisms of government policies or of political ideologies, this is not a sufficient reason to remove a discussion. These online debates are just a consequence of what happens offline, where people can discuss freely in their homes, by e-mails or by telephone."

Even Google, which is suspected of having deleted the images of Prime Minister Berlusconi injured by the results, responded severely to people that approve of censorship; "This is only a technical mistake (…) Google attaches great importance to the impartiality of the results it provides to searches. We don't censor, and we don't delete images."

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