

Lisa Nelson

Does Censorship Make us More Moral

The rise of social and moral ills that found their way from cyberspace to real time and space challenged the creative commons approach in cyberspace and set the stage for a transition in the rhetoric and regulation. The commonly held viewpoint that the internet was a space that defied regulation gradually gave way to one where regulation was not only possible but necessary. The rise of bad behavior, fake news and disinformation has given rise to a variety of technological innovations to make us more moral or to keep us protected from influences that are detrimental. The central assumption of this approach to technology more generally and the internet specifically is that we can use technology to shape (and control) human behavior with technological tools. Yet, the idea that censorship or limiting access to information will make us into better human beings is always a problematic assumption whether it is government or technology that are the tools. Using technology to shape moral behavior on the internet, however, is perhaps even more fraught with problems given our inability to fully control the effects of our technological intentions. Like the early regulatory debate about the internet, our interest in addressing the harms of cyberspace often begins with a similar binary approach – we are the subject and technology is the object - to the question about regulation and development instead of considering how these technologies may be shaping us in ways we did not expect or anticipate.