

**Forum:** *General Assembly 4 (GA4)*

**Issue:** *The use of media and information to foster communication and cooperation at the regional, national, and international level*

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**Position:** *Head Chair*

## Introduction

According to Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the international community is bound to “seek, receive and impart information and ideas, through any medium, regardless of frontiers.” With the advent of digital technology, the spread of media and information is accelerating at an unprecedented speed. The diversity of media forms— from newspapers and pamphlets, radio and television broadcasting, to databases and websites— foster a vibrant media sphere for establishing connections among parties, whether it be between municipalities, governments, or regions.

In an age of digital interdependence, media and information technologies have been utilized to coordinate cooperation. On a national level, the United States eased nation-wide criminal identification with the digitization of FBI records; on a regional level, the European Union launched the Multiannual Financial Framework to promote technologies to connect European citizens and institutions; on an international level, the United Nations compiled a Digital Library of all passed resolutions for archive

However, from advances in media and information consumption arises an array of profound challenges: obstacles to a vibrant media sphere, low internet penetration rates, restraints over a free press, partisanship and politicization over information. As trends in multilevel communication and cooperation indicate increasing reliance on digital media for information dissemination, issues of information transparency and media inclusiveness lessen trust and discourage cooperation. To that end, we must ask ourselves: *how does one effectively utilize media and information to foster communication and cooperation at the regional, national, and international levels?*

## Definition of Key Terms

## **Mass Media**

Mass media refers to forms of information produced and spread to large pool of audience. It entails diversified media technologies such as the Internet, newspapers, television, radio, advertising, magazines, music, and books.

## **Traditional Media**

Otherwise known as old media, traditional media refers to forms of media technologies accessible before the Information Age. Forms of “traditional media include print media (newspapers, books, and magazines), music and film, television, and radio broadcasting.”

## **Digital Media**

Otherwise known as new media, digital media refers to forms of media technologies after the Information Age. The production, distribution, and preservation of these media can take place on electronic devices. Forms of digital media including websites and web pages, programs, video and audio files, and databases.

## **Digital Cooperation**

As defined by the United Nations, digital cooperation is “the ways we work together to address the social, ethical, legal and economic impact of digital technologies in order to maximise their benefits and minimise their harm.”

## **Censorship**

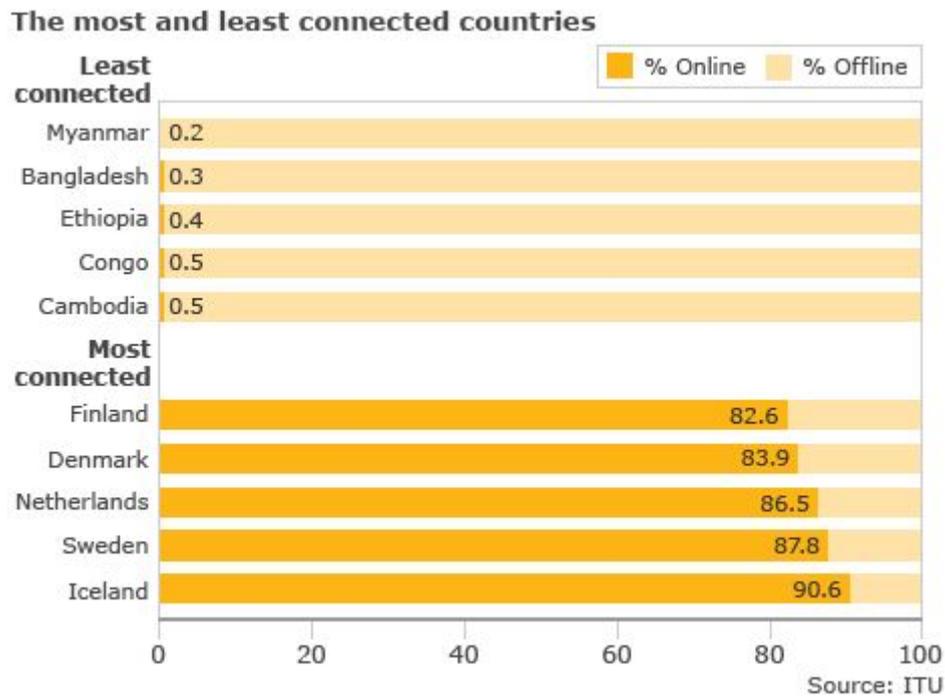
Censorship refers to the prohibition of information deemed subversive of the common good, whether delivered through speech, text, or other forms of expression. Censorship may be executed by private corporations, organizations and institutions, and individuals.

## **Modern Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)**

Short-handedly known as ICT, Information and Communication Technologies are forms of technology enabling real-time communication and collaboration across long distances. Examples of ICT include wireless networks, social networking, telecommunications, and other mediums of communication.

## **Digital Divide**

Digital divide refers to the uneven distribution of access to modern information and communication technologies (ICT) between demographics and geographical regions. Simply put, the digital divide is the gap between those who have access to digital technology, and those who have little to no access.



**Caption #1:** Provided by BBC News, the chart above illustrates the discrepancy in internet penetration rate between the most and least connected countries.

## National Cooperation

National cooperation refers to the collaboration between municipalities within a country. National cooperation entails political and institutional policies and mechanisms instituted by local governments to pursue the interests of the nation. These policies are devised between local governments within a country, such as and can reflect the social, political, cultural, military, and economic values of the country and its respective municipalities.

## Regional Cooperation

Regional cooperation refers to the collaboration of governments within a given region. Regional cooperation entails political and institutional policies and mechanisms instituted by governments to find shared interests and pursue common goals. These policies are devised between alliances of national governments in a common geographical region or economic zone, and can reflect the collective social, political, and economic values of the respective governments. Examples of regional alliances include the

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the European Union (EU), and the African Union; and can be further divided into smaller divisions such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC).

### **Supranational Union**

In a supranational union, power and control is delegated to an authority that is agreed upon by all national governments of the union. An example of a supranational union is the European Union, where the current president Jean Claude Juncker presides over discussions and directs the EU's agenda.

### **International Cooperation**

International cooperation refers to the collaboration of governments across the globe. International cooperation entails political and institutional policies and mechanisms instituted by governments to tackle global challenges that exceed national borders. These policies are devised between two or more, often nearly all, countries across the globe.

## **Background Information**

### **Changes to Media and Information**

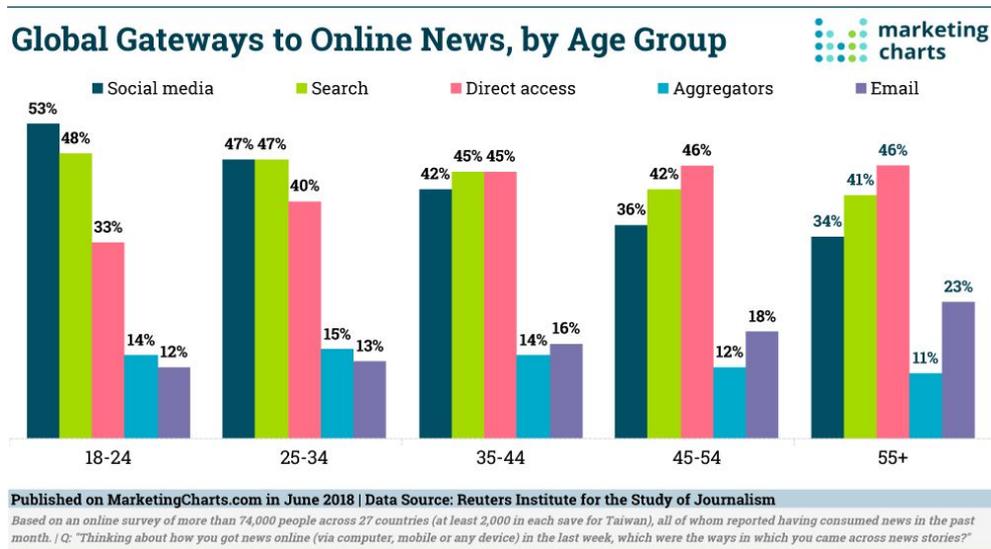
The rapid evolution of media and information dates back to the late eighteenth century, where various media technologies sprung from and contributed to an array of cultural changes in society. Following Gutenberg's invention of the movable type printing press and publication of the first newspaper titled the Daily Courant, the distribution of information has witnessed radical changes. Listed below are two of the many notable eras in the evolution of media and information:

#### ***Party Press Era, 1800s: Politicalization and Censorship***

In the late eighteenth century, Western Europe and the United States saw a spiking increase in the usage of newspaper. Newspapers of this time included short articles, illustrations, and classifieds on topics surrounding politics and society. Yet with the passage of time, politics emerged instrumental in the publication of newspapers; the content and subject matter were often determined by political parties, and papers were often denied publication from colonial officials. It was the Party Press Era that saw the intensifying politicization of media usage, and introduced the idea of censorship in the relatively new field of media and information of the eighteenth century.

### Information Age, 2000s: Technologization and Innovation

Following two centuries of media dominance by traditional and printed media, the Information Age marked an era of an increase in the integration of technology into media practices. Beginning in the twenty century, the rapid industrialization of the society and economy brought about a shift from printed media to digital media. With the creation of modern media technologies— of which include web pages and websites, software, video files, audio files, and databases— information manifested itself into a commodity that is publicly disseminated and made available. These innovative technologies, in light of their efficiency and versatility, were made possible by the advent of machinery, computers, and technological practices.



**Caption #2: The graph above illustrates the many innovative forms of media and information in relation to their use by age groups.**

### History and Trends of Multi-level Communication and Cooperation

Whether on the national, regional, or international level, political cooperation brings governments and political institutions together to pursue common interests and devise appropriate policies. To examine the interests protected through cooperation and the forms such collaboration takes, it is critical to understand its roots and ever-evolving patterns. Provided below is an overview of the history and trends of national, regional, and international cooperation:

#### National Communication and Cooperation

National cooperation— bound to serve the interests of both the larger nation and its smaller municipalities— differ in organization from country to country. In federal states, local governing authorities would cooperate to achieve the goals set forth by the national government,

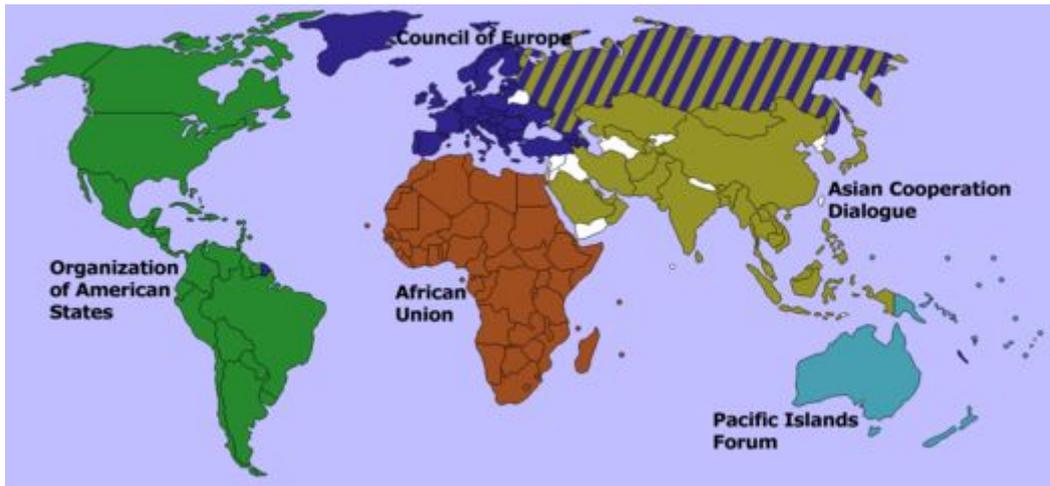
while the national government would govern the interests of the local governing authorities and the people they administer. In unitary states, however, the national government presides over and commands other possible local divisions, while the local divisions faithfully exercise the powers delegated to them. Political cooperation at the national level have long been in place, with the earliest exemplified by the cooperation between the Egyptian pharaoh and Upper and Lower Egypt respectively.

In addition to self-defense and religious support as that of ancient Egyptians, efforts at national cooperation have focused on an array of political, economic, and social factors, with a few of the most prominent being economic growth, healthcare, education, immigration and emigration, civic safety, and environment protection.

### ***Regional Communication and Cooperation***

Regional cooperation— bound to serve the collective interests of governments within a common geographical region or economic zone— are organized either through supranational unions or intergovernmental decision-making. While the former devotes power to a selected authority, the latter shares the same power amongst the governments; nonetheless, both forms of multilateral organization serve to facilitate intergovernmental cooperation. However, political cooperation at the regional level has been a relatively new concept; prior to the twentieth century, merely institutions close in proximity enjoyed political dialogue and collaboration. Yet along with the advent of efficient transportation and communication, the devastation of the First and Second World Wars brought about a need for organization and dialogue at a regional level to maintain stability on the European continent.

Thenceforth, many countries in the same geographical region or economic zone have come together with one another to devise policies and mechanisms to meet their shared interests. Over the decade, efforts at regional cooperation have focused on addressing free trade, facilitating the movement of capital and goods, and reducing armed conflict in their respective regions. Many times, governments have cooperated to reach and adopt cohesive regional viewpoints on policy issues, a notable few include drug policies, global warming, and gun control.



**Caption #3:** *The map above exemplifies the many regional organizations and alliances across the globe.*

### **International Communication and Cooperation**

International cooperation— bound to serve the collective interests of governments across the globe— takes form as the sharing of technology and resources, exchange of information, economic interaction, and forum discussions and conferences. Building on the foundations for multilateral collaboration built upon by efforts of regional cooperation, the earliest form of international cooperation took place with the formation of the United Nations on January of 1942, exemplifying conference discussions as one form of international cooperation with its first General Assembly session on the January of 1946.

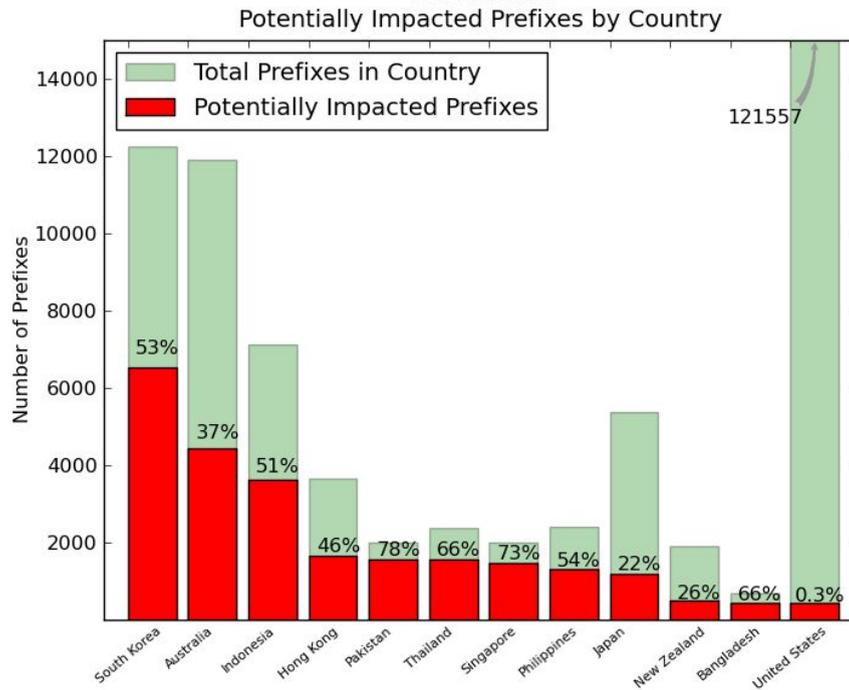
Many topics of the 1946 United Nations session strike similar to the problems demanding international cooperation today: peacekeeping, food security, refugees, and nuclear weapons. Over the decade, efforts of international cooperation have focussed on tackling challenges that exceed the realm of national borders; among the most prominent including combating terrorism as a threat to global security, addressing global warming as a safeguard to shared resources, and exploring the artic as to protect international waters.

## **Key Issues**

### **Censorship**

Censorship lies as one of the many obstacles hindering the full incorporation of media and information in the expansion of multilevel communication and cooperation. This prohibition of information delivered through speech, text, and other forms of expression may be executed by governments,

organizations and institutions, private corporations, and individuals. To successfully facilitate communication and cooperation, the censorship of information deemed subversive of the common good may work for or against the purposes of media and information incorporated.



**Caption #4:** *The graph above is notable for its red bars, indicating the potentially impacted prefixes by the trend of censorship in selected countries around the world.*

One common justification for censoring information is to the ends of national security. A certain extent of confidentiality is upheld during the military, intelligence, and diplomatic operations of all governments, and the release of sensitive information may work against such operations. When finding a balance of what to release and what not to, governments face a choice in the scope (span of subject matter) and depth (extent of intervention) of censorship. Some countries, such as Denmark and Iceland, condemn government intervention in the release of media and information, whilst the censorship of state-owned media has become commonplace in countries such as Syria and China.

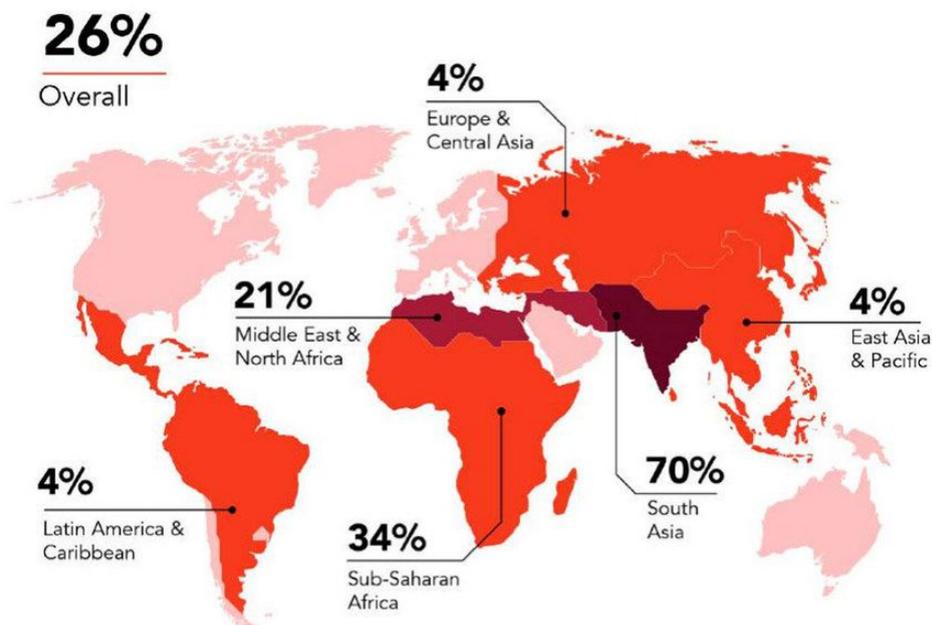
Another common notion that is often invoked by governments is social stability. The dissemination of information may be restricted to maintain public order or to uphold public morals; censorship, in this case, mostly applies to information promoting treason or sedition, such as media releases about anti-government protests and movements. Presumably recurrent in countries such as China, North Korea, and Syria, countless articles have been censored through prior restraint and many journalists are kidnapped and punished in the name of social stability.

Also conducted by private institutions and corporations, other justifications for censorship including repressing blasphemy and heresy, filtering acts of physical and sexual violence, avoiding obscenity and impiety, and safeguarding one or many's privacy.

## Digital Divide

The so-called digital divide remains a persistent obstacle in the fostering of multilevel communication and cooperation, especially in the context of using forms of digital media and ICT to facilitate digital cooperation. Whether accounted by cultural, cognitive, economic, or generational, geographical factors, certain demographics do not enjoy or employ the same extent of technology use than others, and such variance in usage may appear problematic when media and information are intended to reach all populations to facilitate multilevel communication and cooperation.

The underlying cause of this divide is access. One factor that determines the availability of access to ICT is geographical location; certain services, such as fiber optics and internet providers, are challenging to access in certain regions, especially with the availability of infrastructure thereof. Age and generation gaps, too, are notable factors widening the digital divide, with teenagers and young adults using technology extensively and the elderly minimally. Another factor is the restraint of internet usage perpetrated by the government, notable in countries such as North Korea, Iran, and Myanmar. Other factors include socioeconomic status, extent of knowledge, and lack of skills and education.



**Caption #5:** *The graph above exemplifies the digital divide in terms of the penetration of the internet across geographical regions.*

## Falsity and Disinformation Campaigns

Another obstacle to the full incorporation of media and information is falsity in the dissemination of information, specifically through the increase of disinformation campaigns across the world. Perpetrated by national governments, disinformation campaigns are operations spreading false information with the intent to deceive. As per a research study conducted by Oxford University, more than 70 countries engage in disinformation campaigns of various forms— social media, mass media, selected media indifferent— of which a few include China, India, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela.

Falsity, in the context of disinformation campaigns, takes from the effectiveness of multi-level communication and cooperation. On a national level, the authenticity of democratic elections is corrupted, as false information is often disseminated with the intent of discrediting political opponents and silencing opposing views. On a regional and international level, the credibility of the press and large-scaled operations are undermined. In the past year, for instance, the Chinese Government has been utilizing social media posts and advertisements as propaganda weapons to bury opposition from the Hong Kong protestors. With efforts of disinformation spreading beyond national borders with the advent of social media and communication technologies, falsity adds a new dimension to the question of authenticity within multi level communication and cooperation.

## Major Parties Involved and Their Views

### China

Media censorship and secrecy in China has lent a big hand in the nation's success in multilevel cooperation. The Chinese government has introduced more than sixty online restrictions through state-owned Internet Service Providers (ISP) and censored an array of articles and media content through papers and news under government supervision. Expanding beyond its borders, China has invested more than \$1.3 billion to increase its media presence on the international stage through televising state-run programs and broadcasts in more than 140 countries.

Additionally, the Chinese government is notorious for utilizing its absolute control over the nation's media to propagate political notions and impressions. One frequently discussed example is that of the One Belt, One Road Initiative (OBOR), a prominent example of regional and international cooperation the nation has undertaken. Chinese state-owned media frequently publicizing articles, statistics, and footage praising the efforts of China in assisting the economic and infrastructural development of recipient

countries. However, the very same media is often criticized for covering up the ugly truths of the initiative: assets and resources of China's profit and the inevitable corruption of political officials along the way.

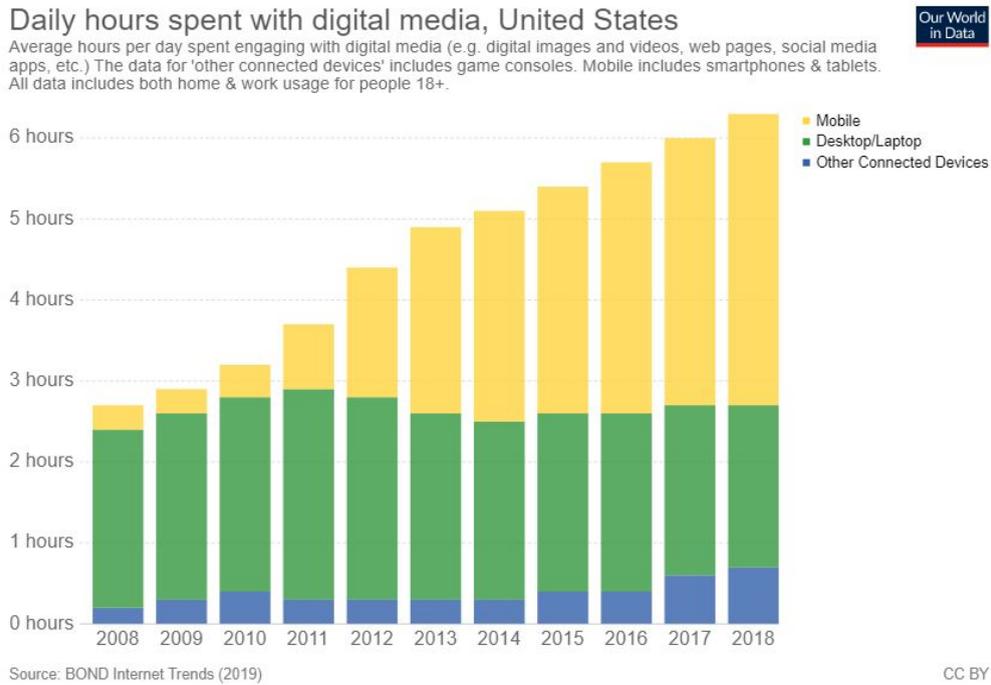
## Sweden

Sweden stands at the forefront of paving a way for multilevel, digital cooperation through the usage of media and information. In 1766, Sweden was the first nation to abolish censorship and guarantee freedom of the press under the law. Though subsidized by the Swedish government, the Swedish press is free from government intervention and censorship, under the exception of pornography, hate speech, and libel. In terms of regional cooperation, Sweden is a member of the European Union and is the union's fourth-largest net contributor. On an international scale, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency has been credited for Sweden's development assistance to enormous developing countries to reduce global poverty.

## United States of America

The United States, well known for its emphasis on the free press, enjoys extensive access to media and information and engages in noteworthy ties with other nations. The nation was one of the many pioneers of the Internet network with the creation of ARPANET, and set a historically high in internet usage worldwide, peaking close to 90% of its population. Notably, the United States is also one of the pioneers in digitizing information into shared databases nation-wide, with the most prominent examples being criminal databases of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

In addition national cooperation facilitated by the digitization of records, specifically by easing the obtainment of information for justice and patrol purposes, the U.S engages in various forms of regional and national communication and cooperation as well. The country is one of the biggest contributors to the United Nations and has maintained notable diplomatic and economic ties with world superpowers such as China, Russia, and South Korea. United States Agency for International Development, additionally, engages with other parts of the world through the delivery of foreign aid and assistance.



**Caption #6: The graph above highlights the significant growth in the usage of digital technologies by adults above eighteen years old.**

## Myanmar

Torn by a series of ongoing internal conflicts, Myanmar enjoys minimal access to media and information and engages in negligible ties with other nations. Although internet usage has increased since the extensive censorship and control of Internet usage by the military regime in 2011, the nation is met with a significantly low internet penetration rate; more than 80% of the Burmese population do not enjoy internet and ICT, restricting the influence of digital cooperation in the nation. In terms of cooperation, too, Myanmar seldom engages in diplomatic ties with other nations, with its most significant attempt at bilateral cooperation being that with China through the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) Initiative.

## Timeline of Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

Date	Description of event
18th Century	<p><b>Beginnings of the Party Press Era</b></p> <p>Over the span of a decade, the Party Press Era saw a period of intensifying politicization of media usage and introduced the idea of censorship in the relatively new field of media and information of the eighteenth century. It was accredited to the influx of politics in Western European and U.S. newspapers.</p>

### **Creation of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation**

July 26th, 1908

To the credit of J. Edgar Hoover, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has been contributing to U.S. domestic intelligence and enforcement of federal law for more than two decades, and has seen increasing incorporation of digital information databases throughout the years.

### **Formation of the United Nations**

October 24th, 1945

The original United Nations (UN) was founded to replace the League of Nations in strengthening multilateral cooperation across the globe. Founded with 53 members, the UN encompasses 193 member states today and stands at the forefront of global response to international matters.

### **Creation of the Cloud-Based ARPANET**

November 21st, 1969

Commonly referred to as the pioneer of the internet, ARPANET was the initial four-node network that gave rise to digital communication and media, where people could reach one another across distances without establishing physical connections.

### **Convention of the High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation**

August 2018

The High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation is a panel convened by the Secretary-General to explore how the United Nations system could utilize the potential of digital technologies to its mission.



***Caption #7: The picture above shows the High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation in action, discussing the utilization of digital technologies to fulfill the mission of the UN.***

### **Creation of the First Shared Database**

September 1973 Created by Charles Bachman, the first Integrated Database System pioneered in the organization of data in the Internet and would mark an era of technology popularity for accessing stored information online.

### **Formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)**

May 25TH, 1981 As one of the most prominent intergovernmental political and economic union in the Arab region, the Gulf Cooperation Council encompasses all Arab states to unite populations rooted in similar Arab and Islamic identities.

### **Formation of the European Union**

November 1st, 1993 With merely six founding members, the European Union unites 28 European member states to strive for peace and stability, economic prosperity, security, inclusion, environmental protection, and scientific advancements of the European continent.

## **Relevant UN Treaties and Events**

- United Nations Convention on the Use of Electronic Communications in International Contracts (ECC), 23 November 2005
- The Age of Digital Interdependence— Report of the UN Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation, 6 December 2019
- Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 25 September 2015 **(A/RES/70/1)**
- Information and communications technologies for development, 21 December 2016 **(A/RES/71/212)**
- Countering the use of information and communications technologies for criminal purposes, 17 December 2018 **(A/RES/73/187)**

## **Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue**

### **China-Russia Digital Media Cooperation Forum**

With the most recent of the three being in November of 2019, the China-Russia Digital Media Cooperation Forum illustrates the vitality of government collaboration is facilitating the incorporation of media and information to foster digital cooperation. Not only was the forum able to bridge closer diplomatic ties between the governments of Beijing and Moscow, it was also able to open the floor for discussion on the importance of digital media in two highly-censored nations.

Zhou Shuchun, editor-in-chief of China Daily, echoed the essence of regional cooperation when she saw digital cooperation to pave way for “more objective voices [to] be uttered and the interests of both countries can be better protected.” As a speculated result of this forum, media relations between the two countries have reached its highest in history, as the two engage in frequent exchanges of research information and organizing digital, joint events. However, the increase in digital cooperation does not address the exceedingly high rates of government intervention in the censorship and restriction of media in both Russia and China.

### **The United States and its Criminal Databases: N-DEx and FBI Systems**

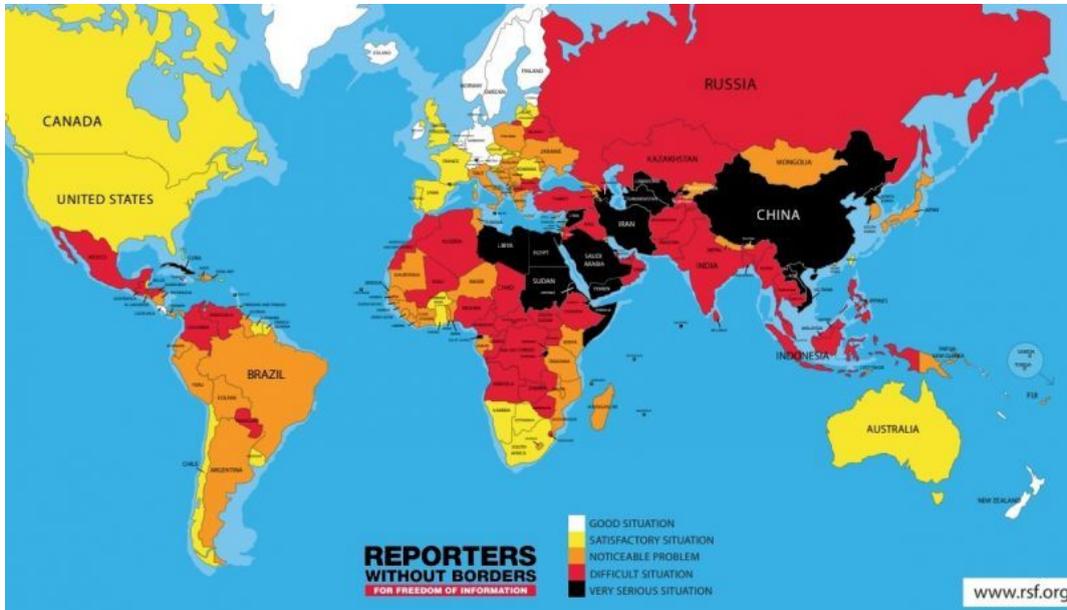
The United States, among a few others who have digitized their criminal records and/or organized national criminal database searches, stands at the forefront of utilizing digital information to facilitate national communication and cooperation. The FBI Vault and the National Data Exchange System (N-DEx) are two of the most notable databases shared by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation. The National Data Exchange System includes criminal justice records, while the FBI Vault encompasses 6,700 digitized documents on criminal law and intelligence threats.

Both examples of databases comprised of information translated from paper into digital files, the two databases enable the access of information away from the file room and are endorsed by a number of major criminal justice associations across the United States. Through record procurement with efficiency, the U.S. is able to enjoy heightened national cooperation with quick access to records and data information from all across the country. Nonetheless, the two databases are lacking in comprehensiveness as many records from local police bureaus are excluded.

### **Reporters Without Borders (RSF)**

Also known as Reporters Sans Frontières, Reporters Without Borders is one of many attempts at advocacy for the transparency and authenticity of media and information. As an international non-governmental organization, RSF works at publicizing attempts at media suppression, providing assistance to vulnerable journalists, and cooperating with institutions to fight censorship. Three decades in, RSF now holds consultative status at an array of organizations— among the most notable being

United Nations, UNESCO, the Council of Europe and the International Organization of the Francophonie— and has established correspondents in 130 countries worldwide.



***Caption #9: The map above illustrates the degree of press and media freedom across the globe, with the extent of censorship progressing proportional to the darkening of color.***

Scratching the surface of the intricate issue of media censorship and intransparency, Reporters Without Borders has yielded limited results and has been rather counterproductive in countries of heavy media censorship. In Cuba, as an example of a country whose government exercises a large extent of intervention in media and information, the RSF employs leaflets, broadcasting and television programs, advertisements, posters and flyers, and other forms of media and information to publicly condemn state-endorsed censorship by the Cuban government. However, rather than pushing the government to reform and change, it has yielded strained and tense relationships between the government and RSF. The organization, additionally, has been criticized for alleged bias, receipt of bribery, and fraudulent use of patronage by various correspondent nations and consultative organizations worldwide.

## Possible Solutions

### Bridging the Digital Divide

Bridging the digital divide would see a potential increase in the internet penetration rate across the globe. To take on such ends, one initiative is to increase digital literacy; possessing practical hardware and software skills may address the existing deficiencies across various age groups. Others that follow would be assisting the development of necessary telecommunication infrastructure, providing

necessary technologies to enable ICT, and to address governmental and institutional restraints on internet access.

Although bridging the digital divide would come about as a prominent solution, it requires careful assessment of the intended scale of interaction. In the case of national cooperation, the importance of public involvement in the interaction between municipality governments should be evaluated. In the instances of regional and international cooperation, the room for public participation in government-government interaction and the respective consequences arises as areas of review.

### **Holding Digital Cooperation Forums and Conferences**

Likely complemented by a co-existing medium for digital cooperation, holding digital cooperation forums and conferences promotes government collaboration on the incorporation of media and information to foster communication. As illustrated by the China-Russia Digital Media Cooperation Forum in November of 2019, conferences may be able to open the floor for discussion on the importance of digital media in our rapidly technologizing era. To the ends of facilitating dialogue between all involved forces, the goal of the conference should be evaluated: whether that be producing a report, cooperation agenda, local indicators, or others.

### **Creating a Centralized, Shared Database**

Although the world has long been exchanging scientific information and data amongst one another, there has yet to be a shared database to house exchanges of such ends. Utilizing technology to synchronize data between parties— whether it be state-to-state, country-to-country, institution-to-institution, or region-to-region— could potentially apply to the communication of identification, criminal, refugee, or scientific information. The prominent benefit of such a database would be the quick access of cloud-based, shared information by all parties. As put by the UN High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation, “we recommend a broad, multi-stakeholder alliance, involving the UN, create a platform for sharing digital public goods, engaging talent and pooling data sets, in a manner that respects privacy, in areas related to attaining the SDGs.”

However, the resistance and scalability thereof have to be taken into account. Centralizing all information on a shared database is like putting all the eggs in one basket; it prompts the development of a database convincing enough to attract stray pieces of data to contribute to its growth. As such, the failure of the database may entail irreversible consequences for the protection of its stored information. Additionally, to account for the sizable growth the database may undergo, the database must possess scalability to allow it to sustain increasing information without sacrificing performance.

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