Does the United Kingdom effectively control the internet using techniques such as Censorship, Surveillance and Data Recording in comparison to other countries?

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Contents

1 Abstract

Recent statistics show that almost half of the world population has an internet connection today. To ensure safety and the protection of the public each government develops a set of procedures and protocols to deter the misuse of the internet by monitoring suspicious activities. This research paper highlights how the UK government differs from the governments of a different country in order to control the internet through various techniques such as internet censorship, government surveillance and one of the more recent topics, data recording. It also attempts to discuss the reasons why each method is implemented and discusses the opinions of the UK public which have been conducted through primary research. The main purpose of the paper is to gather enough evidence to answer the question of whether the United Kingdom is effectively controlling the internet using specific techniques or if they have been misusing these techniques for personal gain, in comparison to the internet controls of different countries.

2 Introduction

As the world becomes a global network online allowing people to talk and share with each other from opposite ends of the earth, a new problem arises in which governments seek to exploit our usage of the internet by using various techniques in which they monitor and control what we share over this global network.

Internet censorship is a key technique used by governments, as Leberknight et al. (2010) states the Internet is supposed to be born free, yet it is censored almost everywhere. This statement suggest that everyone should have the right to use the internet uncensored, but this is not the case as governments censor many parts of the internet which they believe will assist them politically or financially, however in some countries it is less censored than others such as the UK compared to China who significantly censor a significant amount on the internet mainly related to sources criticising the political regime.

Another key reason in which governments want to control the internet is to monitor user activities through government surveillance. A series of media reports in 2013 revealed the surveillance capabilities involving GCHQ in the United Kingdom such as Tempora and its component programmes Mastering the Internet and Global Telecoms Exploitation (Guardian 2012) These programs captured significant amounts of data about everyone who used the internet without any of their permission or knowledge, thus leaving the general populations privacy at risk. It is now clear that government surveillance is a serious problem which needs to be addressed as the government consistently pursues ways to observe everything its citizens are doing turning our society into a panopticon.

Governments highly value data from their citizens therefore it is highly likely that there is a significant amount of data about each person is constantly recorded. There are some reasons in which this may be helpful to society such as preventing terrorist attacks, however in 2002, Stein and Sinha defined privacy as "the rights of individuals to enjoy autonomy, to be left alone, and to determine whether and how information about one's self is revealed to others". The latter part of this definition often contradicts

the approach that governments take with regards to privacy, as they rarely provide internet users with enough control to determine whether and how their information is distributed. In the United Kingdom this is a pressing matter as stated in the Tempora program GCHQ has recorded a vast amount of data on its citizens. (Guardian 2012)

2.1   Literature Review

The Literature Review provided the opportunity to conduct vast amounts of research relating to government controls of the internet, such as internet censorship, government surveillance and data recording. This provided a chance to identify the scope at which the UK government controls the internet relative to other countries, and also analyse the sophisticated methods they use to capture our data and prevent the population from accessing certain information. Significant amounts of research were conducted, mainly information provided by academics in the field. Three specific topics were identified which portrays how the UK and other governments control the internet.

2.1.1   Internet Censorship

King, Pan and Roberts (2013) conducted an investigation on censorship in China, what its primary use is and how easy it is to spot. The findings showed that censorship in China is used to prevent social movements against the Chinese Government. Another research paper written by Leberknight (2010) showed that China had the largest use of 'Blanket Internet Censorship' – where website could be completely blocked from access – which was further linked to a contributing reason as to why Google withdrew from China. The paper also covered the anti-censorship system and its main principles. However, while there are many research papers written on censorship, most are related to the more common use of it in authoritarian regimes, such as China, North Korea, Syria and Iran. As such, the research being conducted in this paper should be able to add to

the public opinions of censorship within the UK – a liberal democratic society.

2.1.2   Government Surveillance

Watson (2002) conducted several surveys on employees and employers within numerous workplaces to see whether they had email surveillance, what kind of surveillance, and what the employees thought and why. The results from these surveys can be interpreted to see their attitudes on overall workplace surveillance. However, this would not be able to apply to personal situations as some employees would show more understanding to a workplace's reasoning for implementing surveillance. Therefore, primary research for this paper shall get the publics' opinion on internet surveillance in regards to the government implementing it instead of the employers. It shall mainly focus on one of the most common uses of the internet today – ecommerce.

2.1.3   Data Recording

In 2014, UK Prime Minister – David Cameron – passed an emergency legislation to retain everyone's web and phone activity (Matt, B., 2015) which caused an upset among the public and privacy organisations. Seeing as a year has gone by since this legislation was passed through so quickly, getting a public opinion this long after the event would be able to show if the upset was momentary or not. As there are no research sources made publically available for use on the subject of data recording in the UK, this paper will be addressing this seemingly untouched subject.

Relevant research in these three fields are lacking as the previous research focuses on the topics on the whole but they do not conclude whether the procedures are relevant and whether they need improving or not, which is why the research that will be conducted for this paper will help with the scarcity of information. Additionally, most of the research done is on countries other than the UK, with most censorship research being

conducted either on authoritative regime countries, or the US.

3 Methodology

In terms of methodology there were various aspects of both primary and secondary research that was carried out in order to gather evidence and support for the objectives proposed, which also proved to be useful during the comparison stage. The primary research for quantitative data included distributing surveys amongst twenty people and the research for qualitative data was interviewing members of the community to gain an understanding of what people believe about the UK government and the control that they possess over internet censorship, privacy and government data recording.

The survey was distributed to twenty people and it consisted of twenty questions which was divided into four separate sections which had five questions each and also included a comments box at the end, there was also a small gift provided for each respondent primarily because it can be hard to get participants. The first section mainly referred to demographic information such as gender, age etc. The second section was in regards to internet censorship and what people thought about the government censoring online content such as certain videos, advertisements and websites. The purpose of this was to conclude if the majority of people believed it is right or wrong. The third section highlighted privacy issues, due to the fact that privacy is such a broad topic the survey questions were mainly focussed to social media privacy on websites such as Facebook and Twitter, the questions were mainly created to gain a deeper understanding of how often people used social sites. The final section of the survey underlined the government data recording and mainly concentrated on the most recent surveillance law which consists of user internet activities being stored for a year by internet service providers, in order to understand the opinions people have over this law.

There are various advantages from surveys which proved to be essential factors when deciding upon primary research methods some of these include cost, which simply means that they are very cheap to process and carry out another factor is they are flexible in other words they can be carried out by hand on paper, online and even in face to face conversations (Wyse, 2012).

The most important factor was that the surveys were all anonymous, which was clearly stated at the top of the survey, the purpose of anonymity was to have a possible effect on the honesty of the answers given and to also protect people's privacy. Although surveys provide various advantages there were also some disadvantages that had to be highlighted before deciding upon surveys as a method of research. The main disadvantage was the accuracy of the answers provided, some respondents possibly rushed the answers where as others did not feel comfortable representing themselves in some of the demographic questions (Wyse, 2012), another disadvantage was that surveys are closed-ended questions so respondents may not be able to express their views in detail. In order to challenge these disadvantages there was a small gift given to all respondents as a way of showing them appreciation for taking their time out, there was also a comment box provided at the end to give respondents the chance to convey extra views.

In order to gain depth into the research it was important to communicate directly with people through the use of individual interviews. Interviews proved to be an essential research method for qualitative data mainly because of their open-ended questions which allowed the interviewees to articulate their true opinions on the questions presented, which can be supported by an article discussing methods of data collection which stated that interviews are still the most common methods of qualitative research (Gill, 2008). Similar to surveys the interviews consisted of twenty questions which were split into three sections after the exclusion of demographic questions to avoid privacy issues as some people did not want to share their name, age or nationality.
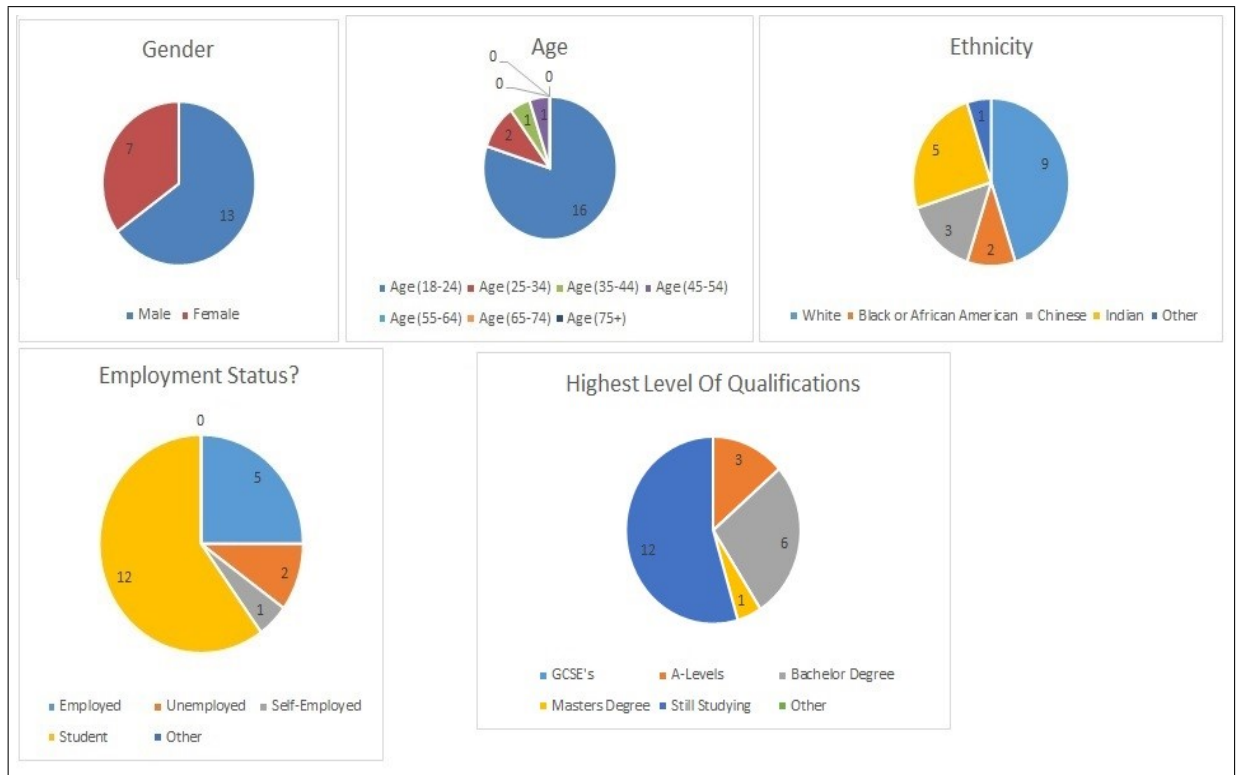
The main advantage that was also the deciding factor to using interviews as the qualitative method was because of the fact that all interviews were video recorded, it allowed the opportunity to capture the emotions and body language of the interviewee which in a way could possibly represent the passion towards the question in other words it could show if they were actually interested or not. The biggest disadvantages of conducting interviews were the setting up and finding the people phases, these were problematic because of weather issues and simply because people did not want to take part, these problems also possibly influenced the way in which people answered the questions asked for example if someone was in a rush they would not answer properly, another disadvantage was that the

interviews were time consuming.

The secondary research was all conducted to compare how the UK government controlled the usage of the internet in comparison to other countries. The best way to achieve facts and statistics of other countries was to search for existing articles and projects that had already highlighted the same topic. The advantages of secondary research were that there was a lot of research conducted over the years and it was easy to differentiate between the UK governments compared to that of a different country. The biggest disadvantage was that searching for relevant articles was time consuming.

The presentation of all the quantitative data found was put into tables and charts to clearly highlight the results that were found. The qualitative data on the other hand was summarised and analysed thoroughly.
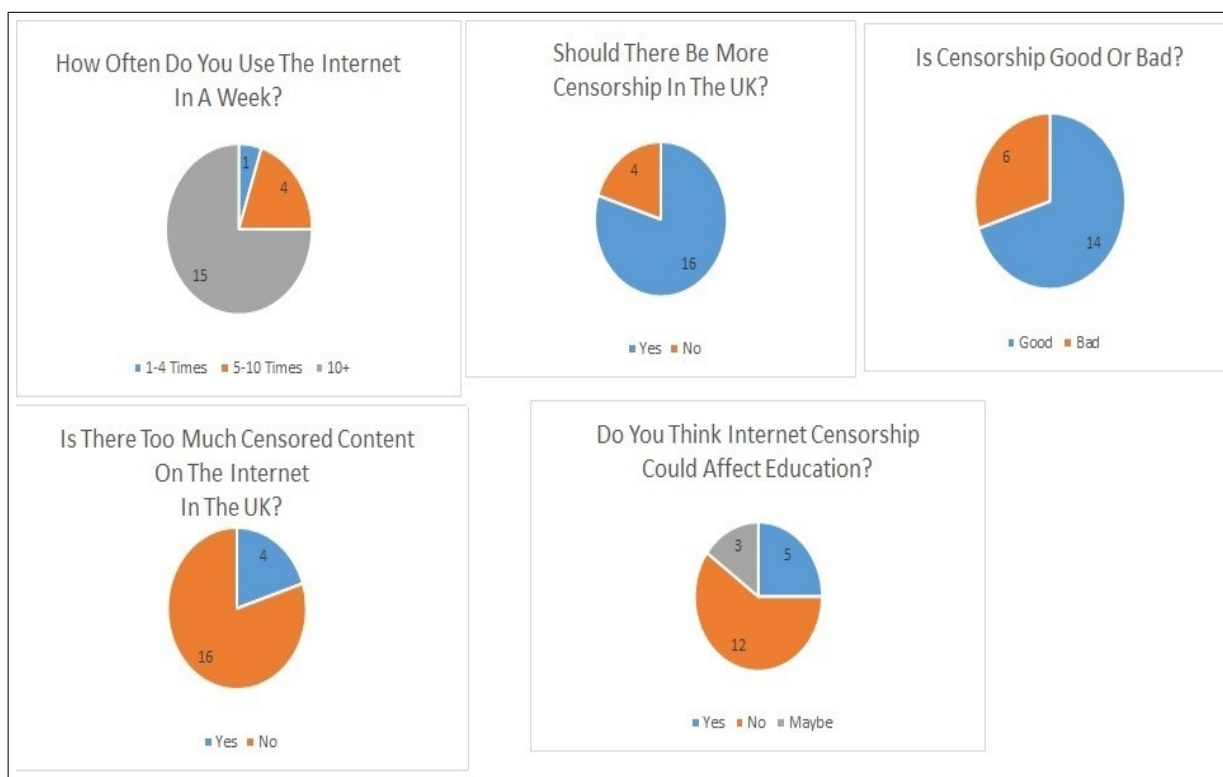
4 Analysis

The first section of the survey was based on demographic questions which were created in order to gain some background information about the person answering the survey. It was important to ask both males and females to compare and contrast the difference of opinions towards the questions proposed. The majority of the people asked were aged between 18 and 24, the reason for this was that statistically in 2014 a staggering 87% of people used the internet with the majority of the people aged between 18 and 29 (Pew Research, 2014). The reason for asking a question that related to ethnicity was in order to compare how people from different ethnic groups felt towards the UK Governments internet control procedures, another reason for choosing the ethnicity question was in hope that one of the respondents would leave some form of information regarding the
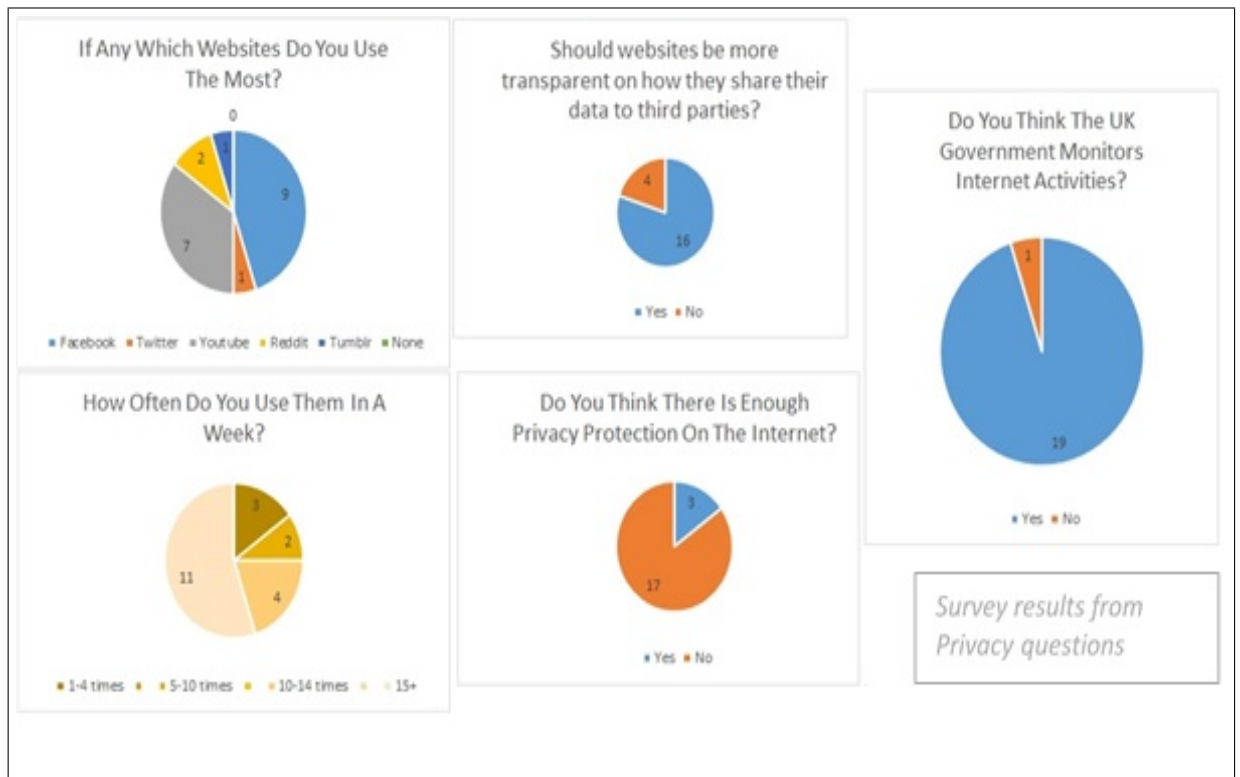
government controls of a different country. 12 of the respondents asked were students who were currently still studying the age groups would suggest towards a Bachelor Degree, it was practical to ask a question relating to employment because according to recent research nearly 100% of 18 and 24 year olds who are in education have access to the internet (Pew Research, 2014) which shows that students are possibly the main users of the internet with the best understanding of censorship, privacy and data recording.

4.1   Internet Censorship

The second section of the survey was based on censorship questions which were created in order to get the respondents basic opinion on censorship, how much content the government censors, and its effects. It mainly helped to conclude whether they believed censorship was right or wrong. By asking

how often the participant used the internet it was possible to grasp the likelihood that they have encountered issues with censorship such as videos being taken down and the results show that the majority of the respondents were using the internet more than 10 times in a week. Participants were asked whether they thought there should be more censorship in the UK in regards to the internet to see if they were satisfied with the amount of censorship currently being implemented, nearly all of the respondents believe that there should be more censorship in the UK which possibly illustrates that the procedures in regards to censorship need improving. Following that, asking whether they thought it was good or bad as a way of seeing whether they were okay with the concept of censorship, which resulted in the 14 out of the 20 people asked agreeing that censorship is good, as while expected of nations such as China and North Korea – the UK is an established liberal democratic nation (Nunziato, 2010-2011) therefore concepts such as censorship can end up going against certain freedoms that are promised. Asking about the amount of censored content on the internet in regards to the UK is a continuation on the participants' opinions on censorship which showed the same number of people who believed there should be more censorship, also believed there is not too much censored content on the internet which not only shows possible accuracy in the results it also hints that the government needs to censor more content. These questions can all be linked and the results show a correlation in the answers between the participants' opinions of censorship and whether they think that there is too much censored content on the internet. The final question asked for this section was to gather thoughts about the knock-on effects censorship could have on education in the future which resulted in 12 of the respondents believing censorship would not affect education. This could relate to students being unable to read valuable information sources because of certain words that could be picked out and blocked for the safety of the students. Additionally, as the average age of internet users is getting lower, the need for censorship will become greater as while schools can implement strong censorship restrictions within their area, the students can still access sites with potentially questionable content outside of school.

Survey results from Privacy questions

4.2 Government Surveillance

The third section of the survey was based on privacy questions which were created in order to get the participants' opinion on privacy and to get a rough idea of the websites they tend to use, but also to see whether they are aware of government monitoring of our internet usage. The first couple of questions that were asked to gain an understanding of the participants' usual internet usage (The websites they use and how often in a week) this is important as it shows how many sites they use that collect personal information which is possible to be sent to third parties. The results showed that websites such as Facebook and YouTube were being used the most and possibly accessed more than 15 times a week per user, which represents a higher chance of people facing privacy breaches. The next question was in regards to websites and data transparency to see how much internet users feel about their information being shared amongst these third parties (if

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they are told at all), The results highlighted that the majority of people asked believed that websites ought to be more transparent on the data they share to third parties, which could possibly mean that people are not aware of how their privacy is being invaded. In the case of Facebook, there is a constant question about how much information they can gain about you from other websites you visit. Facebook newsroom – which cover potential features and details on updates to the website – posted, "And we're continuing to improve ads based on the apps and sites you use" (Egan E, 2014) which brings the question to just how much data they can see. It was important to question if the participants' felt that there was enough privacy protection on the internet because this could show whether the current privacy protection on the internet is enough, this could also highlight the need to emphasize to internet users to be careful what information they give out over the internet, the results to this question show that the majority of people believed there is not enough privacy protection which similarly supports the question in regards to censorship protection and there not being enough of it. After that, it was questioned if the respondents thought that the UK government monitors internet usage in order to see if users are aware of the fact, with all but one showing awareness of the government monitoring internet activities. Earlier this year, David Cameron stated that, "he would stop the use of methods of communication that cannot be read by the security services even if they have a warrant." (Griffin A, 2015) which hints at the fact that the government can view most of our internet activity but want to see even more.

5 Qualitative Research

For the qualitative primary research, ten people were interviewed. The interviews were undertaken after the completion of the surveys and they consisted of five males and five females in an attempt to get a fair representation of each gender.

Each interviewee was asked questions which were recorded to capture any details that were missed during the actual interview it also presented a chance to focus on the tone of each interviewee. The questions given were all designed to be open ended to allow each participant to easily voice their own individual opinions on the matter. Ten questions were asked with the first four based on censorship home and three based on internet privacy and data recording respectively. The first question, 'is censorship good and why?' was posed to each participant, the majority of them agreed that censorship on the internet is required to prevent underage users from accessing websites that are not appropriate and most of them also showed negativity towards some of the content that is being shared on Facebook which links back to the survey figure 1.1 about how the Government needs to take more action. However, one of the interviewees stated that "it should be the parent's responsibility to monitor what it is that their children do whilst on a computer". Although a valid point it was shown in a survey conducted by McAfee in 2010 that up to 70% of teenagers hide from their parent's what it is that they do whilst on the computer (Leigh, 2012).

The interviewee was then asked "do you believe it is a positive action for the government of a country to stipulate what is and is not censored in their country". When posed with this question the majority of the participants had differing points of views. One of them responded "No" followed by the explanation "Because you get countries like china and Russia who censor anything that doesn't fit their political views, when this happens it becomes less about protecting people and more about keeping the people in the dark about what is actually going on in their own country and those around them". This view can be show in an example like North Korea, where internet is so censored in a way in which to keep the

dictatorship strong and stop people speaking out about it. Another one of the interviewees said that it was necessary for governments to censor the internet as they are the ones who make the laws and therefore they should be responsible for the internet in their own country. Two of the interviewees believed that each country should have a group of individuals with no political ties or prejudices (much like magistrates in a court) that decide up in the rules of censorship for each country.

The third and fourth questions were more close-ended questions such as "do you feel there is too much censorship on the internet". All ten of the interviewees gave the same answer, "No" which links back to the survey and supports the claim of there not being enough censorship on the internet. The next question asked "Do you feel like UK censorship is stricter than that of other countries?" which resulted in all but one of the participants stating it is less strict. This could possibly show that when online in the UK, Censorship does not really affect the day to day usage of the internet or that the respondents are just not currently aware of how much they are censored.

The first two questions in regards to surveillance and privacy asked was "how do you feel about your online data being collected and saved". The answers received for this consisted of two trains of thoughts one was "I'm not happy that someone has access to everything about me" and on the other side "I am okay with my data being saved and monitored as I have nothing to hide" even though both are valid points, six out of the ten people agreed with this second argument, however the other four claimed that when asked about the sale of personal data, they were not happy that about companies selling their data to third parties. When looking at the answers to both of these questions it is clear that on average most people do not mind their data being saved and monitored when it is for a good reason and not that of financial gain.

To press further on their understanding of the data that is stored from the internet. The each interviewee was asked "do you read the terms and conditions provided when signing up for a webpage. The idea behind this was to access the level of knowledge that the individuals had any idea of what data is stored on them. However when all the respondents replied with a resounding no it was not a surprise, as the guardian newspaper

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stated "research reveals just 7% of Britons read the online terms and conditions when signing up for products and service" (Smithers, 2011). The results from this question further show that the average internet user within the United Kingdom do not really care how their person data is used.

The final three questions were based on data and privacy asked, the first of them being "who do you think should be responsible for the safekeeping of the data that is collected on the internet?" eight of the participants similarly stated that "it should be the people that collect the information that are responsible for keeping it safe" which simply refers to websites that transactions can happen, Which lines up with the data protection act, where collected data must be "kept safe and secure" (Data Protection Act, 2015). Whereas the other two gave an answer similar to that of the censorship question, they believe that there should be a group of impartial individuals that manage the saved data. The second question was "how often do you shop online in a month" which the majority of people stated more than five times which links to the survey and shows similarities in the results. The final question for each interviewee was "do you think online shopping is safe" with only 2 out of 10 people responded with "no" which might possibly be because they have never had any issues with online shopping etc.

6 Secondary Research

After carrying out thorough research it has become evident that the Government internet controls in China are more strict and effective in comparison to the UK. In regards to censorship strictness an example can be clearly highlighted by an article that stated if an internet user searches for the term persecution they are likely to get a response back with a blank screen stating page cannot be displayed (Wiseman, 2008) considering that the article was written seven years ago it also made a claim about the Beijing government intensifying its efforts to control what its citizens can read and discuss online, which has become more apparent in the modern era clearly highlighted in a much more recent article which labels the internet censorship and surveillance as the great firewall (Stout, 2015). In comparison to the UK people could argue that more censorship could be problematic for people who attempt to carry out research in regards to banned terms such as persecution, which could be seen in favour of the UK having effective methods intact.

Similarly the internet surveillance in China is also becoming very strict with a new Internet law's being introduced recently which will make it easier for those with higher authorities to force compliance from Internet service providers, which will have major effects for their internet users. The Government are required to monitor the activities of internet users and if they violate the laws then they have to request the network operators to stop transmitting the data (Moody, 2015). Comparing the surveillance protocols in China to that of the UK, it is apparent that China has more focus on internet surveillance which can be shown through their laws and ideas to further develop these laws, In defence of the UK controls one could argue that the UK government maintains its secrecy when it comes to monitoring activities whereas the Chinese government make it apparent which could influence their internet users to find ways around the great firewall.

The golden shield project which has been referred to and is also known as the great firewall of China, not only monitors activities, and censors

content for internet users, it also blocks incoming data from other countries which can protect personal data that the government holds of its citizens in China, which differentiates from the UK who have no such effective measures in place. In defence of the UK it is clear that data protection and data recording has become more of a known issue and to tackle this the government has introduced a new law, Although the law simply highlights that websites can hold personal information for a year, it also prevents people from purchasing suspicious items online which aids the government in monitoring the internet users. After comparing some of the government internet controlling techniques it is quite clear that China is far more superior to the UK and that the Chinese government have more knowledge of what their internet users are doing. On the other hand it can be concluded that the UK has more knowledge that China over their citizens but they do not make it apparent, and all the internet monitoring is carried out in secrecy. Both countries are continuing to develop their control over the internet which highlights they believe there is still clearly room for improvement.

7 Conclusion

Vast amounts of data analysis performed has shown us the extent to which the United Kingdom government are willing to go to control our internet usage in comparison to other countries, which is a considerable concern for its citizens. Three key techniques used by governments to control the internet were identified through academic research, these were censorship, surveillance and data recording.

Through the analysis of internet censorship in the United Kingdom and other countries it was shown clearly that being a liberal democratic country, the UK has significantly low levels of censorship on the internet compared to communist and dictatorship regimes such as China and North Korea who wish to possess an iron grip on what their citizens are able to access through the internet. Primary research also indicated how some people in the UK believe there should be greater censorship, although were a bit concerned as to how the government would approach it without limiting the freedom of content needed for educational purposes. Thus proving that internet censorship is an incredibly fragile technique to control the internet and must be limited to how much the governments should be allowed to directly impact the freedom of the internet.

It was clear through the analysis of the research that government surveillance is a very sensitive topic, where certain people have conflicting views about how their own personal internet data should be monitored. Privacy was shown to be very important to people who use the internet and it was believed that the majority of websites had significant privacy controls in places but still should have possessed more controls and become more transparent about where internet users' data ends up. As indicated in the analysis the UK government have showed that they are consistently monitoring our internet usage and have event attempted to pass legislation to remove encryption, showing that not only are they invading our privacy but are also out of touch about knowing how important encryption is. Compared to other nations the UK has very sophisticated monitoring techniques through GCHQ which is in part more to how well developed the

nation is, as they are able to tamper fibre optic cables to retrieve our data and this presents a serious threat to our privacy. This is best summed up by P.M. Schwartz who claims that despite the positive effect that the Internet has had on our society, "the Internet's technical qualities also have a negative consequence: they make possible an intense surveillance of activities in cyberspace" (Schwartz 1999).

Data recording was a very controversial topic in research conducted as it highlighted how people value the data that they share and have very little control over it. As the analysis has shown governments can benefit significantly from this as the law indicates they are allowed to store data for a year. The majority of people who took the survey was against this as they believe they should decide how long their data is stored and not the UK government. It was also shown in the analysis that many people believe that data storage can be significantly harmful as it can become compromised and pose a serious threat to the public. Many other nations decide to have strict policies on data collection although certain countries such as the USA believe it is in their interest to store their citizens' internet data as it allows the prevention of criminal activities and terrorist threats. This is a very serious technique used in controlling the internet and has mixed opinions from various people, therefore governments should make it a priority to clarify the data they are storing and exactly how it would be used.

Improvements in the United Kingdom controls of the internet using censorship, surveillance and data recording have been highlighted throughout the research paper; and as the internet continues to grow significant strides need to be made to evolve the way the United Kingdom handles its control over citizens' internet usage. Nonetheless relative to other countries, the United Kingdom has a solid infrastructure in surveillance and data recording to which they should become more transparent about. On censorship the United Kingdom censors very little which is very important in allowing freedom on the internet. Thus overall the United Kingdom controls the internet fairly effectively in comparison to many other countries.