

Laura DeNardis & Andrea M. Hackl Précis

The paper *Internet Control Points as LGBT Rights Mediation* by Laura DeNardis and Andrea M. Hackl explores various functional areas of internet governance, including domain name assignments, intellectual property rights enforcement over LGBT speech, and the policymaking roles of private information intermediaries. It also examines how internet governance influences community formation and identity expression. The primary goal of this paper is to illustrate how conflicts and social struggles over LGBT rights are increasingly embedded within internet governance and digital infrastructure. The authors shift their focus to internet governance control points as mediators of LGBT rights, analyzing their implications for scholarship at the intersection of internet governance, public policy, and activism. This research is particularly relevant to social activists, media companies promoting free expression and human rights, and policymakers shaping digital regulations. The ideal audience for this paper includes scholars in internet governance and digital rights, LGBTQ+ rights advocates, policymakers, tech industry professionals, educators, and students studying communication and internet governance.

The first section of the paper examines debates surrounding LGBT rights and how they have been mediated through digital content. One example is the *It Gets Better* campaign, where participants changed their profile pictures to the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) equality logo in support of overturning the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). Another campaign, *All Out*, featured a video of a lesbian figure skater winning the 2014 Russian Olympics and kissing her partner, bringing visibility to LGBTQ+ representation in sports. These examples highlight the role of online content in shaping public discourse while also exposing users to cyberbullying and other digital conflicts. The research in this paper structures LGBT rights mediation through a six-level typology of internet governance, illustrating how different components of governance influence LGBT rights and broader human rights concerns. These six functional areas include control of critical internet resources, setting internet standards, access and interconnection coordination, cybersecurity governance, information intermediation, and architecture based intellectual property rights enforcement.

The second section of the paper explores the various technological limitations imposed on LGBT rights across different platforms, including the internet, gamertags, search engines, and cybersecurity. In the realm of internet governance, the controversy over the proposed .GAY top-level domain (TLD) highlights the intersection of technical and political decision-making. ICANN, the organization responsible for domain name assignments, received nearly 2,000 applications for new domains in 2012, including .GAY. However, concerns arose about whether this domain would serve as a safe and inclusive space for the LGBTQ+ community. Gaming platforms have also faced backlash for their policies on LGBT-related gamertags. Companies like Xbox and Nintendo have banned usernames such as “theGayergamer” and “RichardGaywood,” citing violations of platform guidelines. A more extreme case occurred when Microsoft mistakenly banned a player simply for listing their location as Fort Gay, West Virginia, which is a real town. Search engines similarly enforce restrictions, often influenced by government policies or corporate interests. Russia’s 2013 “gay propaganda law” led to the censorship of LGBT websites like Gay.ru and Deti-404, with site creators facing fines and public criticism. Cybersecurity governance plays a crucial role in maintaining internet access and online safety, especially when individuals face

discrimination based on their identity. In 2013, after the Ridgedale Church of Christ expelled a family for supporting their lesbian daughter, hackers abused the church's Facebook page with pro-LGBT messages. This shows how cyberattacks can be used both as a tool for shaping public perception.

The final section explores different strategies for mediating rights, highlighting opportunities for scholars and activists to drive change in LGBT rights. The paper stresses that advancing these rights goes beyond just communication strategies. There needs to be a stronger focus on content, organization, and, most importantly, creating conditions that truly promote human freedom and expression.

Reference

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