EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY ON INDIVIDUALS PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS BANNED BOOKS

Ravi Narayanaswamy
Assistant Professor of Management
School of Business Administration
471, University Pkwy
Aiken, SC 29801
ravin@usca.edu

Kari D. Weaver
Assistant Professor of Library Science
and Library Instruction Coordinator
Gregg-Graniteville Library
471 University Pkwy
Aiken, SC 29801
kariw@usca.edu

ABSTRACT

For several years numerous books have been banned in communities across United States. However, the emergence of information and communication technologies (ICT) has not only enriched individual's knowledge but also has provided wider access to information. This study explores how ICT has changed human attitudes towards challenging books and previously banned books. The findings from this study can help us understand the impact of ICT on individuals' actions towards challenging books. From a broader perspective, it can enrich us on how the community at large is reacting towards the *banned books*.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of the United States, libraries have been established to provide access to materials independent of content, but these actions have not been without controversies [5]. In many communities, individuals have challenged materials freely available through the library, resulting in a list of *banned books*, books which contain material objectionable to the individual or the society at large. Numerous books have been banned in communities across the United States since the early 1900's, but since 1990, the American Library Association Office of Intellectual Freedom has annually tracked the statistics of book challenges.

The emergence of information and communication technologies (ICT) has enriched the individual's access and exchange to information [1]. In today's digital environment, information about objectionable material can be easily located and retrieved on the internet [2]. ICT is more increasingly used by individuals for their information processing and communication purposes. New technological innovations such as social networking and Web 3.0 services have eliminated the barriers to free flow of information

[8]. People are becoming increasingly aware about what and why individual books have been challenged. More interestingly, the objections are becoming more specific and not generic anymore [5]. For instance, the challenges listed for the book *The Chocolate War in year 1981 was "offensive language and explicit descriptions of sexual situations in the book" compared to year 2007 was "peppered with profanities, ranging from derogatory slang terms to sexual encounters and violence"[4 pages 174-176].* More interestingly, this book which was banned in the 1980's has become widely available in the library collections and is allowed for reading with parental permission [4]. This shows that the human attitudes towards challenged books have been changing along with the emergence of other contextual factors such as technology [12]. Thus it is imperative to understand how the advent of ICT has influenced the individuals' perception towards banned books. The main objective of this study is to explore the questions: How ICT influence individual reasoning toward challenged books? How ICT impacts the specificity of the book challenges? Doing so will help us understand individuals reasoning towards the *banned books*, in general it will depict if individuals have a greater opportunity to make themselves aware of the objectionable content prior to drawing personal conclusions. From a broader perspective, it can enrich us on how the community at large is reacting towards the *banned books*. From a librarian standpoint, we believe there will be a transition in their roles towards *banned books,* that is, they will no longer act as gateways to the information, but now act as educators on issues of book challenges.

BACK GROUND LITERATURE

Banned Books and Information and Communication Technology

The issue of banned books has been escalating since early ages which began censoring materials based on religion, politics, or profit [5, 7]. Though more popular throughout history in authoritarian regimes, religious institutions, including the Roman Catholic Church, have participated in book banning, with the church confiscating books and persecuting individuals found to be in possession of banned materials [3]. Even though the United States does espouse democratic ideals, book banning has been enforced by law and government institutions. In particular, book banning has been enforced by the United States Postal Service through The Comstock Act of 1873, which outlawed the mailing of "obscene, lewd, and/or lascivious" materials [3]. The involvement of religious groups, law, and public agencies highlight the intensely social nature of book challenges. Nevertheless, libraries have traditionally provided access to materials, even those that may have been outlawed based on The Comstock Act [5]. Technology is increasingly changing how individuals interact with libraries, who now serve increasingly as a gateway to resources in digital formats through public internet access instead of the traditional role as a repository of books [6]. In particular, ICT has helped individuals overcome personal, economic and geographical barriers to access of information about books giving them opportunity to learn about the book [8]. This is evident in recent initiatives including Google Books, Project Gutenberg, HathiTrust Digital Library and International Children's Digital Library. In summary, individuals now have multiple venues providing access to books and other information.

More recent studies observe that digital technologies have changed the face of censorship and book banning [9]. Likewise, new digital inventions such as e-commerce, social networking have brought a big relief from the persistent impediments to free expression and greatly increased access to banned books [5, 8]. It has widely noted that ICT has facilitated access and exchange of information [6]. For instance, an individual can share his/her thought on sites such as Twitter, Facebook and get feedback from millions of users [10, 11]. Thus the individuals can now form their own opinions based on the free exchange of information rather than abiding by existing norms. Extending this rationale to banned books, we contend that individuals will have greater specificity when presenting reasons for book banning.

METHODOLOGY

To address the research objectives, statistics collected by the American Library Association will be used. Even though book banning has existed since the early 1900's, we have chosen to use data from 1990 through 2010, when the American Library Association began tracking statistics. Data on the total number of book challenges, reason for challenge by year, type of library in which the challenge occurred by year, book descriptions and the individual or group challenge initiator by year will be utilized to examine the impact of ICT on banned books. Due to confidentiality requirements, no personally identifiable information will be included in the statistical data provided by the American Library Association. The process for acquiring the data has been initiated, and the approval process is in progress. The data will be analyzed to determine overarching trends and patterns.

POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

We expect to see a change in the overall trends of book banning, pre and post digital era, due to the influence of ICT on information access and exchange. In addition, the findings may depict the changes in overall reasoning behind book challenges. We hope that there will be variations in the number of books being challenged and the number of challenges for each book due to ICT. Finally, due to increased information access and exchange, the individuals may be more familiar with the content of challenged books, which could reflect in more informed judgments regarding book challenges. In conclusion, we hope ICT has widened the opportunity for access to banned books, which, in turn has enhanced individual intellectual freedom.

REFERENCES

1. Cunningham, C., and Coombs, N. *Information access and adaptive technology*. Phoenix, Arizona: American Council on Education and Oryx Press., 1997.
2. David, L., and Elizabeth, M. Intellectual freedom: access to ideas, access to information, and access to technology. *Teacher Librarian.*, 39, 1 (2011).
3. Dell, P. *You cannot read this!:Why books get banned.* . Mankato, MN: Compass Point, 2010.
4. Doyle, R. *Banned Books: Challenging our freedom to read*. Chicago, Illinois: American Library Asscoiation, 2010.
5. Foerstel, H.N. *A Reference Guide to Book Censorship in Schools and Public Libraries*. Wasington D.C.: Library of Congress, 2002.
6. Haywood, T. *Info-rich, Info-poor: Access and exchange in the global information society*. London: Bowker Saur., 1995.
7. Humphries, C. The banning of a book in BC. *British Columbia History*, 45, 1 (2012).
8. Knight, J., and King, C. A Question of Accessibility: Exploring Barriers to the Freedon of Information Flow. *Journal of Library and Information Science*, 39, 2 (2010), 93-101.
9. Simmons, J.S., and Dresang, E.T. *School censorship in the 21st century: A guide for teachers and school library media specialists*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2001.
10. Tufekci, Z. Grooming, gossip, facebook and myspace:what can we learn about these sites from those who won't assimilate? *Information, Communication,and Society*, 11, 4 (2008), 544-564.
11. Vasalou, A., Joinson, A., and Courvoisier, D. Cultural differences, experience with social networks and the nature of "true commitment" in Facebook. *International Journal of Human Computer Studies*, 68, 10 (2010).

12.   Venkatesh, V., Thong, J.Y.L., and Xin, X. Consumer Acceptance and Use of Information Technology: Extending the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology. *MIS Quarterly*, 36, 1 (2012), 157-178.