Consent of the Networked: The Worldwide Struggle For Internet Freedom

By Rebecca MacKinnon

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The Internet was going to liberate us, but in truth it has not. For every story about the web's empowering role in events such as the Arab Spring, there are many more about the quiet corrosion of civil liberties by companies and governments using the same digital technologies we have come to depend upon. In *Consent of the Networked*, journalist and Internet policy specialist Rebecca MacKinnon argues that it is time to fight for our rights before they are sold, legislated, programmed, and engineered away. Every day, the corporate sovereigns of cyberspace (Google and Facebook, among others) make decisions that affect our physical freedom—but without our consent. Yet the traditional solution to unaccountable corporate behavior—government regulation—cannot stop the abuse of digital power on its own, and sometimes even contributes to it.

A clarion call to action, *Consent of the Networked* shows that it is time to stop arguing over whether the Internet empowers people, and address the urgent question of how technology should be governed to support the rights and liberties of users around the world.

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Editorial Review

From [Booklist]

Who owns the Internet is a question commonly answered with descriptions of how it is decentralized and anonymous, thus implying that the answer is no one. Otherwise, web surfers wouldn't see the plethora of extreme site choices, from online alternative-medicine guides to antigovernment chat rooms. Yet according to media policy expert MacKinnon, the freedom to post and roam on the Internet to one's heart's content with minimal privacy worries is being curtailed insidiously from multiple sources. MacKinnon begins by drawing on her past experience as a Beijing CNN correspondent, describing how, far from being a tool for undermining tyranny as it was during the recent Egyptian regime collapse, the Internet in China has been policed and co-opted by the government to spy on its citizens. Although these human-rights abuses are not as obvious in Western nations, MacKinnon points out that American corporate interests and political conservatives are pushing to restrict Internet freedoms as well. A vitally important analysis of Internet manipulation that should be read by anyone relying on the web for work or pleasure. --Carl Hays

Review

Cory Doctorow, Boing Boing

"It is an absolutely indispensable account of the way that technology both serves freedom and removes it. MacKinnon is co-founder of the Global Voices project, and a director of the Global Network Initiative, and is one of the best-informed, clearest commentators on issues of networks and freedom from a truly global perspective. MacKinnon does a fantastic job of tying her theory and analysis to real-world stories."

Guardian **(UK)**

"This timely, scholarly survey of global offences against 'freedom' on the internet also points out that Facebook, Google and the like supply 'corporate' rather than 'public' spaces, whose users are subject to the unsophisticated moral diktats of their owners."

Pop Matters

"Fluent in Mandarin, MacKinnon spent nearly a decade as a CNN correspondent in Beijing, including several years as the bureau chief.... Her insight into how Western perception of the state of the Internet in China differs from the true situation on the ground is invaluable."

James Fallows, National Correspondent, *The Atlantic*

"For nearly a decade, Rebecca MacKinnon has been at the center of evolving debates about how the Internet will affect democracy, privacy, individual liberties, and the other values free societies want to defend. Here she makes a persuasive and important case that, as with other technological revolutions through history, the effects of today's new communications systems, for human liberation or for oppression, will depend not on the technologies themselves but rather on the resolve of citizens to shape the way in which they are used."

Joi Ito, Director, MIT Media Lab

"*Consent of the Networked* will become the seminal book firmly establishing the responsibility of those who control the architecture and the politics of the network to the citizens who inhabit our new digital world. *Consent of the Networked* should be required reading for all of those involved in building our networked future as well as those who live in it."

Micah L. Sifriy, techPresident.com
"Count me among those who are thoroughly convinced by MacKinnon's reporting and arguments.... In many ways, MacKinnon's book is the one Evgeny Morozov should have written, if he was more interested in building a sensible movement for Internet freedom rather than conducting scorched-earth warfare against people who believe the Internet can help strengthen democratic culture.... While *Consent of the Networked* offers netizens a workable roadmap to a real vision of internet freedom, the people who should most read this book aren't the already aware, but folks—especially policy-makers—who see all the shiny devices and trendy social media and foolishly assume that the Internet will ultimately prevail. It might, but only if we understand what a lucky and unusual accident the Internet really is, and that to keep it open and free, we have to fight for it."

Craig Newmark, founder of Craigslist
"A growing number of people throughout the world are counting on the Internet to move their countries in a more democratic direction. *Consent of the Networked* describes what's happening, successes and failures, what's next, and what needs to be done. It's the real deal."

Kirkus Reviews
"An incisive overview of the global struggle for Internet freedom.... In her wide-ranging book, MacKinnon details the many ways in which governments, corporations and others are using the Internet—from empowering people to helping authoritarian dictators survive."

Booklist
"A vitally important analysis of Internet manipulation that should be read by anyone relying on the web for work or pleasure."

Mother Jones
"[A] sharp, sobering rebuttal [to] heady rhetoric, questioning and complicating our understandings of what it means to be free online. MacKinnon's book presents a cogent picture of the many ways in which our lives, both online and off, are increasingly affected by regulators, politicians, and companies seeking to carve territories into the still-amorphous web.... [T]he book's intention isn't to offer up a set of neat solutions, but to spur all of us to pay more attention to the threats lurking beneath the web's shiny baubles, and to exhort us to take a more active role in claiming and defending our digital power, rights, and freedoms. In that, *Consent of the Networked* succeeds admirably; it should be required reading for anyone who cares about the future of the web—that is, for all of us."

Anne-Marie Slaughter, Bert G. Kerstetter '66 University Professor of Politics and International Affairs, Princeton University
"*Consent of the Networked* is a must-read for anyone interested in freedom of personal and political expression in the 21st century. It's accessible, engaging, and periodically hair-raising. It should have the same impact on public awareness of the vital issues surrounding Internet freedom that 'An Inconvenient Truth' had with regard to climate change."

Mary Robinson, Former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and President of Ireland
"The Internet poses the most complex challenges and opportunities for human rights to have emerged over the last decade. Rebecca MacKinnon's book is a clear-eyed guide through that complexity."

Joseph S. Nye, Jr., University Distinguished Service Professor, Harvard University, and author of *The Future of Power*
"Cyber power and governance of the internet is one of the great unsolved problems of the 21st century.

Rebecca MacKinnon has written a wonderfully lively and illuminating account of the issues we face in this contentious area. It is well worth reading."

Washington Times
"Insightful and moving.... Ms. MacKinnon's stories of the effort occurring worldwide as people harness the Internet, often with a political, socioeconomic or religious motivation, are discerning, harrowing and empowering. From Egypt's record of torturing and jailing bloggers, China's system of corporate-level censorship and South Korea's strict requirements for real identification for online users, Ms. MacKinnon repeatedly strikes the appropriate balance between a technological discussion of the Net and the significance of human rights.... Packed with thorough and impeccable research and persuasive, eye-opening anecdotes from around the world, *Consent of the Networked* should spearhead a robust debate and join the handful of other books that successfully guide the reader through the land mines surrounding responsible use of the Internet."

Boston Globe
"Internet policy maven Rebecca MacKinnon warns in an important new book… that the liberating power of digital technology is under threat from corporations and governments alike.... [MacKinnon] argues that neither political action nor competitive pressure spawned by the free market will protect our rights, finally making a strong case for a third way—a nongovernmental watchdog with sufficient clout to preserve freedom on the Internet."

Observer **(UK)**
"In her grand sweep of 'the worldwide struggle for internet freedom', Rebecca MacKinnon alights on the many dilemmas facing policy makers and corporate chiefs, and the many threats that cyberspace poses for individual liberty.... Thoroughly researched by one of the experts in the field, the book straddles the line between an academic and general audience. Mac Kinnon entreats internet users to see themselves as active citizens—not consumers or eyeballs. She harks back to Huxley's *Brave New World*… [and] ends with a rallying cry."

L. Gordon Crovitz, ***Wall Street Journal***
"'Consent of the Networked' describes how important it's been for the Internet to develop outside of multinational organizations, with technology companies, engineering associations and civil society groups having as much influence as governments.... Applying the political-science notion of a social contract to the Web for 'consent of the networked' is a novel approach. It recognizes that the Web is global, with an inherent ideology in favor of more transparency and greater access to information."

New York Journal of Books
"Ms. MacKinnon provides expert reporting and analysis of Internet censorship and acts against individuals by authoritarian regimes around the world including China, Iran, and Egypt, among others. Communication doesn't move in a straight line, and more often than not, it occurs outside the lines of what we many people like.... [If] you are a Google user and don't understand their recently updated privacy policy, and are tired of trying to puzzle it out, then *Consent of the Networked* is for you."

Wall Street Journal
"[M]any thinkers on the information-wants-to-be-free side of the debate present the same binary choice, seeing almost any state control of the Internet, or any government attempt to protect intellectual property, or even the attempts of private social networks to get people to log in with their real names, as affronts to democracy comparable with the worst excesses of repressive regimes. Luckily, Ms. MacKinnon's analysis is more nuanced and balanced than that, and *Consent of the Networked* is an excellent survey of the Internet's

major fault lines."

About the Author

Rebecca MacKinnon works on global internet policy as a Schwartz Senior Fellow at the New America Foundation. She is co-founder of Global Voices Online, a global citizen media network that amplifies online citizen voices from around the world. She is also on the board of the Committee to Protect Journalists and worked for CNN in Beijing for nine years. Recently, she was a Visiting Fellow at Princeton University's Center for Information Technology Policy. MacKinnon is frequently interviewed by major media, including the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, *The Financial Times*, National Public Radio, BBC, and other news outlets. She lives in Washington, DC.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Erin Kizer:

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information for your better life within this era. So now let us teach you the relaxing pattern is your body and mind is going to be pleased when you are finished looking at it, like winning a sport. Do you want to try this extraordinary shelling out spare time activity?

Darlene Gutierrez:

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