The Citizen Lab

Latin America and the Caribbean CyberWatch: March 2013

A monthly report on trends in online censorship, information operations,

and Internet use in Latin America and the Caribbean

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CUBA

Dissident blogger to start independent news outlet

Cuban dissident blogger Yoani Sanchez has announced that the next step in her fight against the restrictive Cuban government is to start an independent news outlet. Sanchez, who is currently on a world tour which began last month after being granted a travel visa from the Cuban government, made the announcement in Mexico at the Inter American Press Association Meeting. She mentioned that she is already in the first stage of this project, working together with a small team of people. Sanchez claims that the combined digital and hard copy format of the news outlet will make it more accessible to Cubans, as most do not have a reliable Internet connection. She is also visiting the US this month to speak about press freedom issues.

VENEZUELA

Twitter user arrested for "destabilizing" message

On March 14, Venezuelan police [arrested and detained](#) Lourdes Alicia Ortega Pérez for sending out a tweet that they claim was a "destabilizing message" to the country. In a tweet, Ortega responded to someone inquiring about the death of Hugo Chave by [saying](#), "I do not know but he has become a wax doll." This message prompted police to seize Ortega's computer on the charge of "spreading rumours" and [usurping the identity](#) a of notary official. Cuban netizens [responded](#) to the arrest by posting under the hashtag [#tuitdesestabilizador](#) (meaning "subversive tweet"), daring the government to arrest everyone posting allegedly "subversive" messages. Two days after her arrest, Ortega was [released](#), but her activities are still being monitored by the courts.

COSTA RICA

Internet connectivity speeds rank low on global scale

The latest "[State of the Internet](#)" report recently released by Akamai Technology shows that Internet connectivity speeds in Costa Rica are [lagging behind](#) other Latin American countries, and rank 74th globally. Despite significant gains in speed over the past two years, Costa Rica is still behind other countries in the region, such as Chile and Colombia. The government of Costa Rica has set a [goal](#) for 2014 to have 10 percent of the population with access to an Internet connection, and connectivity speed of at least 2 Mbps. The low connectivity and availability of connections are especially concerning in light of Costa Rica's 2010 declaration that access to the Internet is a [fundamental right](#).

CHILE

Satirical Twitter account creator arrested

In a case that highlights the lack of protection for user rights internationally, Chilean blogger and lawyer Rodrigo Ferrari is [facing trial](#) and jail time of up to 541 days for running a Twitter account (@losluksic) parodying the prominent billionaire, Andrónico Luksic. Personal information about the Twitter account holder was [obtained](#) by Chilean authorities, who requested the US government to ask Twitter to release the account information. By utilizing US laws, prosecutors circumvented a Chilean law that requires a warrant when seeking a user's identity information. Ferrari was investigated for two years without his knowledge, until his Twitter account was shut down and he was arrested.

BRAZIL

Brazil Internet use expanding, video consumption major factor
According to a recently released report by comScore, Brazil's online video consumption grew by 18 percent from 2011, with Facebook being the fastest growing video platform with four times as many video views as 2011. The report, entitled 2013 Brazil Digital Future in Focus, outlines Brazilian Internet usage over the past year. It found that Brazilians spend about 27 hours per month online, the majority of which is spent on social media sites, Google and YouTube. The increase in Internet usage in Brazil now puts it as the seventh largest market for video views, and one of the largest users of Internet worldwide, with a rapidly growing e-commerce market.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Twitter, social media used as communication tool during massive blackout
On March 30, Trinidad was hit by a massive blackout that affected the entire island for almost 12 hours, and Twitter and other social media networks proved a vital tool for users to share updates on the situation. Many with 3G access used Twitter to contact news channels for information, as the government was slow to respond. In the aftermath of the blackout, The Guardian newspaper pointed out the importance of mobile technology and social media during a crisis, highlighting how savvy communication between government and citizens can improve how a crisis is dealt with. This is the third major blackout in Trinidad and Tobago in the past three years, and the most widespread one to date, which was blamed on a disruption to the natural gas supply to the islands.

CARIBBEAN REGION

Hacking and security breaches on the rise in the Caribbean
With several major security breaches across the region in 2013, Caribbean tech experts are speculating that the Caribbean is increasingly becoming a target for hackers. This month alone, two major bank hacks occurred. In Jamaica, CIBC FirstCaribbean International Bank records were hacked, and in the Bahamas, all banks had their credit cards compromised and were forced to issue new ones to thousands of customers, following a break of security from outside of the country. One Caribbean blogger has compiled a list of major hacks over the last couple of years, including six hacks of major companies in 2013 thus far. Due to the fledgling nature of Caribbean Internet networks, digital security is still weak, and resources and infrastructure are still in development, making it an easy target for security breaches.

Read previous editions of the Latin America and the Caribbean.