The mention of censorship of 16th-century “social media” (“A message from the hand of John Stubbs”) brings to mind more recent instances of social media monitoring and censorship. For instance, a year or two ago several schools banned the Yik Yak app, and people have called for more such actions:


What do you think?

The section of the chapter headed “An appetite for news” describes early primitive “newspapers” that contained mostly “accounts of miracles, disasters, murders, and monstrous births.” Does this sound like anything we have today?

There is reference to a play by Ben Jonson that made fun of “news junkies” and other people connected with news writing. Jonson implied that writers of the time “made up whatever news they thought their credulous customers wanted to hear.” Have there been any modern cases of newspapers or other news media publishing false stories that were made up by the writers?

See:

- [http://academics.smcvt.edu/dmindich/Jimmy's%20World.htm](http://academics.smcvt.edu/dmindich/Jimmy's%20World.htm)

The section entitled “The explosion of 1641” describes an explosion in printing, from a few hundred to forty thousand new titles in the space of just a few decades. The reason, in this case, was the newly-gained freedom from censorship. In our time, easy, cheap access to the internet
and to free publication platforms (like blogger.com) has created a similar proliferation in (online) publications. Is this an unconditionally good thing?

We learn that “the pamphlets of the 1640s existed in an interconnected web, constantly referring to, quoting or in dialogue with each other, like blog posts today.” Can you think of any good examples of this on today’s web that involve a wide audience? (So, not just back-and-forths between small groups of friends, but genuine online debates involving a wide variety of contributors.)

Elsewhere Standage writes, “A more direct adversarial approach was to quote chunks of an opponent’s text . . . and to respond to each chunk in turn, a technique that has since been revived by modern bloggers.” Can you think of any good modern examples of this technique?

Another technique used in pamphlets of the time was “printing passages from an opponent’s work and juxtaposing them with contradictory statements from the same author to highlight the inconsistency.” Can you think of any modern-day examples of the same technique?

One of the concerns raised at the time of this outpouring of pamphlets was that future historians would not be able to separate fact from fiction amid all the printed texts. Do you think historians will be able to make use of our blogs, tweets, Facebook wall postings, texts, etc., to form an accurate picture of real events of our time?

Milton’s Areopagatica is one of the most famous written pieces about freedom of the press. Do you fully agree with Milton (keeping in mind that there are many more kind of documents and writing in our time than there were in his and that far more people are able to read) that we should allow everything to be published, letting readers make up their own minds?