

New Internet law mere scrap of paper

The country's first law that demands netizens reveal their real names when online is not being policed almost one month after its implementation.

The Hangzhou municipal government in Zhejiang province has required Internet portals under its administration to ask for the real identity of their users from May 1. The law is designed to protect national security, social order and the social moral system.

However, nearly one month after enactment, netizens can still post opinions on most of the city's popular bulletin boards without registering their personal details.

A spokeswoman surnamed Zhou from 19lou.com, a popular local online forum, said yesterday that authorities had not yet asked the website to change its registration process.

"It could be quite complex if the regulation comes into force because our system doesn't support real name registration, it might still take some time," Zhou said.

Calls to the municipal public security bureau, responsible for policing the law, were unanswered yesterday.

A recent online survey by qq.com found about 78 percent of those polled, or more than 35,000 people, were not in favor of the law.

"The law may be able to curb online rumors and violence, but it may also violate our privacy and freedom of speech, as well as discourage online supervision over political corruption," a netizen called Baiyunzhijia wrote on bbs.zhoushan.cn.

"The Internet has played a key role in the supervision of government work and in the fight against corruption in recent years," said another online user Dazhanpeng.

"It would have been impossible for Zhou Jiugeng, former director of a real estate management bureau in Jiangsu province, to have been pulled from his post unless online photographs exposed his lavish lifestyle last year."

Li Li, deputy director of Shanghai Information Law Association, said the law still faced challenges if it were to be executed.

"It is difficult to implement because people in Hangzhou still have the choice to browse websites in other cities if they don't want to provide their real identities," he said.

The law ... may also violate our privacy and freedom of speech, as well as discourage online supervision over political corruption.

BAIYUNZHJIA
A Web user

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Procurator Yangtao from Ganzhou, Jiangxi province, wrote on his blog that the regulation was unclear.

"It prohibits spreading rumors online, but the question is how to define rumor. Faced with dangerous situations, people will naturally take precautions and send warnings to their friends. Can information spread that way really be called rumor?"

Li added: "Netizens already know that even if they don't use their real names, they could still be tracked through their IP address by authorities. The regulation has only angered them

by making that point explicit."

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