

# China's tech commissars target SMS porn

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China's Ministry of Information Industry, the regulator of telecom, Internet and information-technology development, said it is targeting cell-phone smut.

Shen Yongtao, the MII's deputy director of Service Quality Supervision Office at the Telecom Administration Bureau, told Russia's Interfax news agency Monday that China's first set of short-message-system content rules, which will cover objectionable materials, would be released soon. The restrictions reportedly will attempt to curb pornography and prostitution and were developed in conjunction with the Ministry of Public Security.

Estimates vary, but hundreds of millions of short messages are sent every day by China's 350 million-plus cell-phone users, making it a profitable wireless value-added service. At peak periods, such as during the Chinese New Year, more than 1 billion messages are sent in a single day.

Many of those messages apparently contain pornography or are related to prostitution.

The MII issued new policies last spring to regulate SMS providers that focused on pricing and subscription issues. Shen said then those policies targeted illegal service providers but also would provide the legal basis for the authorities to take action against smut.

On Tuesday United Press International asked Qin Gang, a spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, how China interpreted the issue of

digital human rights. Did the country have a definition for the freedom of expression and assembly for the new telecommunications media, particularly after new regulations restricting dissemination of information via cell phone, online news services, bulletin boards and e-mails were handed down Sunday?

"I think the relevant authorities of the Chinese government have already answered questions on what the goals were in making the announcement," Qin replied. "I don't want to repeat it here."

Qin noted reports by the journalists present, including UPI, on this issue.

"Every country in the world will regulate the Internet and the media in accordance with law," he said. "It is only natural. There is no need to make a fuss about it."

Qin rebuked UPI on the phrasing of the question.

"You asked if there are any human rights in terms of Internet in China," he said. "I don't agree with your wording. I think in China media and Internet should operate in accordance with law; any media in any country has to operate in accordance with law."

China has given itself a black eye among those concerned with digital human rights by hiding behind the right to make laws. The clampdown on what constitutes criminal content is expanding in an attempt to prevent the creation of a true civil society.

There are no official data on the extent of the cellular porn-message problem; however, many mobile-phone users in China are thought to have received some type of suggestive short-message spam at least once in the last 18 months. Increased numbers of mobile-phone subscribers are filing complaints concerning pornography and other illegal content

SMS spam.

UPI has received perhaps six unsolicited SMS transmissions over the last two years. They were sent in mainland simplified Chinese characters and offered a range of lewdness and sexual services, real or virtual. They are an easily eliminated and forgotten annoyance, just like their e-mail counterparts, such as those offering cheap airline tickets and other travel arrangements, or real-estate deals and illegal cable TV hook-ups.

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