

Bing blocks online sex searches in Middle East: study

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This picture taken in 2009 in Paris, shows the front page of the new Microsoft search web engine Bing. The Open Net Initiative (ONI) on Friday said Microsoft's search engine Bing is more prudish than government censors when it comes to sex-related online queries.

The Open Net Initiative (ONI) on Friday said Microsoft's search engine Bing is more prudish than government censors when it comes to sex-related online queries.

A January test of a [Bing](#) version tailored for users in Arab countries showed that it filtered Arabic and English words for sexually explicit content along with queries related to gay, lesbian, bi-sexual or transgender material.

Attempts to use filtered keywords prompted a message reading "Your

country or region requires a strict Bing SafeSearch setting, which filters out results that might return adult content," according to ONI.

The message seemed at odds with the fact that while political censorship is widespread in the Middle East, not all countries there mandate filtering of sex, nudity, [homosexuality](#) and other such "social content," ONI reported.

"A more targeted approach - either country-based or preferably, defined by the user - is more generally consistent with minimizing the impact on [freedom of speech](#)," ONI study authors concluded.

"Microsoft has signalled its willingness to be at the forefront in protecting freedom of expression around the world. It is difficult to reconcile this position with Bing's current filtering standards."

The report noted that Bing didn't impose search settings based on IP addresses indicating where computers are located, so users can get around filters by choosing versions of the engine crafted for other countries.

Microsoft did not return an AFP request for comment.

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