Conner Hepting

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Personal Reflection on Group Project

In my group project with Kyle, Maddi, Michael, and Justin, we talked about the regulation of speech on social media and certain circumstances where that speech was rightfully or unrightfully limited. I specifically worked on the case of Facebook and false information. I focused on how Facebook has run into some controversy with users based on what they have censored and who they have removed from their site. Conservatives, especially, were very upset with how many people with right views had been removed for their speech, but Facebook claimed they were just cracking down on extremism and misinformation. This ultimately led to the question what social media platforms are and how can they moderate content. I also discussed section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which states that as long as social media sites stay as platforms not publishers and remain politically neutral in their censorship that they are exempt from legal problems. I specifically discussed how Facebook claims they are a platform and politically neutral, but many conservatives have voiced their beliefs that Facebook is doing the opposite and limiting their free speech as a publisher.

Through this information and the information my partners discussed, I learned that although there is much controversy and many laws surrounding this debate, there is no clear dominant belief on the issue. Everyone has different views and it is nearly impossible to come to a clear consensus on whether or not these social media companies can legally regulate our speech, and how they are allowed to do it. In every situation there are different opinions from all kinds of different people. In addition, I learned about Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which I hadn’t previously known protected social media companies like Facebook from legal prosecution when moderating their websites. Finally, I learned a lot about the reddit situation with r/The\_Donald. I had never heard of this situation before, and I am not a big reddit user, so all of this was new information to me. It showed me how it is necessary to have some way for social media sites to moderate what happens on their sites, or truly disgusting acts, similar to the one in this example, will continue to happen.

In my own experience, I have not been affected greatly by the limiting of social media, however I have seen it in action. I am a big Twitter user and accounts that I follow or see retweets of are constantly banned or censored. This is especially true in the current political climate and during the pandemic. I have seen many personalities that I follow or at least know of, banned because of controversial posts. Typically, this doesn’t really phase me because they are accounts that don’t deeply resonate with me and were actually providing controversial or hateful messages. Overall, this is the only direct experience I have had with the limiting of social media and the debate around its legality.

Looking back in reflection on our project, my main takeaway is that we should’ve practiced our presentation more before we actually presented. I thought our information was overall fairly good, but we didn’t have that smooth flow that a presentation should have. We didn’t know exactly when to change the slides, and at the end during the questions we wanted to switch off who asked them, but we didn’t practice enough so Kyle just took them over. In regard to the information in our presentation, the only thing I would have focused more on is the current political climate and the pandemic, and how this free speech debate applied to those two things. However, in the end I can confidently say I really enjoyed working with my group and I think we did a great job.