

CS 4001: Computing, Society & Professionalism

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Week 5: Networked Communications
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Implications of Internet Technologies

- Many Internet technologies were developed without taking social expectations into account
- New technologies sometimes cause new social situations to emerge

Censorship

- *Censorship is the attempt to suppress or regulate public access to material considered offensive or harmful*
- Forms of censorship
 - Direct censorship
 - Gov't monopoly, e.g., former USSR
 - Prepublication review; e.g., can't publish classified material
 - Licensing & registration, e.g., TV stations must comply with decency laws or lose license
 - Self-censorship
 - CNN suppressed negative reports on Iraqi gov't to keep Bagdad Bureau open
 - Publishers wanting to maintain good relationship with the government
 - Voluntary rating systems, like the mature label on games




Does the Internet pose new challenges to censorship?

Censorship and Internet

- Unlike traditional one to many broadcast media, the Internet supports many to many communications
- The Internet is dynamic – new devices are being connected each year
- The Internet is huge – human censors not practical
- The Internet is global – national governments have limited authority to restrict activities happening outside their borders
- It is hard to distinguish between different types of people e.g., children and adults on the Internet

Internet Surveillance


- Many governments employ filtering or surveillance (or restricting access) of Internet content
 - North Korea
 - Middle East
 - China
 - Germany
 - United States



Discussion point 1: What are the benefits and harms of Internet censorship or surveillance?

First Amendment

- It constrains what the US government can do
 - Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances
- The primary purpose is political – allow an open discussion of public issues; allow minority perspectives to be represented
 - But extends to other domains
- Not an absolute right
 - The private right must be balance against the public good



Discussion point 2: In the US, television commercials for cigarettes are banned. Should there be a ban on commercials for violent video games too? (Describe in the light of “private right versus public good”)

First Amendment

- Private groups can censor all they want and in some cases may seem to violate the first amendment
 - E.g., Facebook's Terms of Service disallow the sharing of explicit or violent content
 - In general written with "offensive"/controversial speech in mind
- Covers spoken & written words, pictures, art, and other forms of expression of ideas (like wearing an arm band)

First Amendment


- Existing restrictions on speech
 - Advocating illegal acts can be acceptable (e.g., civil disobedience)
 - Libel (making false and damaging statements) is illegal
 - Making specific threats is illegal
 - Inciting violence can be illegal
 - Perjury
 - Obscenity
 - False advertising



Class Activity 1: Freedom of speech and privacy



Class Activity 2: Freedom of speech and public good



Social and ethical tensions of Internet use – other examples

Children and Inappropriate Content

- Many parents and guardians believe that they ought to protect their children from exposure to pornographic and violent materials
- A few years ago the center of concern was the Internet – various kinds of blockers and filters are used
- But with smartphone use and their ubiquity, this problem has become a larger challenge
- How to tackle with inadvertent blocking of legit content? Sometimes blacklisting may be used by some organizations to curb expression of specific ideologies and ideas

Child Internet Protection Act

- In March 2003, the Supreme Court weighed testimony in the case of United States vs. American Library
- The CIPA requires that libraries receiving federal funds to provide internet access to its patrons must prevent children from getting access to visual depictions of obscenity and child pornography
- ACLU argued that web filtering is not perfect – legit content can be withheld; having adults request turning the filters off can be stigmatized
- **Analysis with ethical theories (page 132-135)**


Spam

- What is spam?
- With ease of internet access, businesses looked for ways to capitalize on market opportunities associated with Internet communications – easier/cheaper to send emails than physical mails
 - How to find email addresses though?
 - Crawling the web; scrape address books with viruses; listen to chatroom conversations; sneaky way to sign up; dictionary attacks on ISPs
- This entrepreneurial behavior has given rise to a new set of legal and ethical problems

- Cyber Promotions versus American Online
- The scenario:
 - AOL blocks Cyber Promotions email
 - Cyber promotions changes “from” address
 - Cyber promotions sues AOL for violating first amendment rights
 - Loses
 - AOL defends self by claiming violation of property rights; carrying spam is a cost to AOL

Case Study: Ann, the Acme Accountant


- Ann is an accountant at Acme Corporation, a medium sized firm with 50 employees. All the employees work in the same building, and Ann knows all of them.
- Ann's 10 year old daughter is a Girl Scout. During the annual Girl Scout cookie sale, Ann sent an email to all the other employees, inviting them to stop by her desk during a break and place orders. Nine of the recipients were too happy to get this email and placed orders, but the others were annoyed with the unwanted message. Half of them complained to a coworker about Anne's action
- Did Ann do anything wrong? Analysis with different ethical theories (page 113-115)




Discussion point 3: Why is “cold calling” considered to be an acceptable sales practice, but spamming isn’t?



Class Activity 3: Right to Internet Access



Discussion point 4: Should people publishing accusations against others on their blogs or Facebook pages be held responsible if they disseminate false information?



Discussion point 5: Should the tax dollars of citizens of democratic nations be used to help people in authoritarian nations get around the Web censorship of their repressive governments?