CS 4001: Computing, Society & Professionalism

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Week 5: Freedom of Speech and 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

- *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

Kant's vs. Mill's Views on Censorship

- Radically different ethical theories, but had similar views on censorship

Kant's View

- Kant asked: "Why don't people think for themselves?"

- He replied rhetorically: "Laziness and cowardice are the reason why so great a portion of mankind, after nature has long since discharged them from external direction, nevertheless remain under lifelong tutelage, and why it is so easy for others to set themselves up as their guardians"

- Kant believed he lived in a time in which many obstacles prevented people exercising their own reason

Mill's View

- Mill championed freedom of expression

- He offered four reasons
    - Preventing someone from voicing their concern could be silencing truth
    - A person can be erroneous, but all opinions need to be heard to assess the whole truth
    - Truth needs to be rationally tested and validated
    - An opinion that has been tested through open discourse is likely to have a "vital effect on the character and conduct"

Mill's Principle of Harm

- "The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over by any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant"

- Why use of adult porn by adults should not be censored by the government

- Why cyberbullying is bad

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

Platform measures

- Reddit bans sexually explicit photos

- Google provides a mechanism for victims to request that sexually explicit content of themselves posted without their consent be withheld from the search results

- Facebook and Instagram remove pornographic content

- Twitter prevents the sharing of intimate media taken or distributed without subjects' consent

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

- Kantian evaluation

- Act utilitarian evaluation

Evaluation of CIPA with Ethical Theories

- Social Contract Theory
    - Freedom of thought and expression is prized

- Installing filters does not seem to be necessary to preserve the public order

- In other words, it is difficult to gain consensus that private viewing of pornography makes social living no longer possible

- Issue is outside of the social contract and freedom of conscience should be given precedence

Censorship and Internet

- Many governments employ filtering of or restricting access to certain Internet content

    - North Korea

    - Middle East

    - China

    - Germany

    - United States

Class Activity 1: What are the benefits and harms of Internet censorship? Cite one benefit and one harm with an example for each.

Freedom of Expression

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

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 – balancing private right and public good
  - 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

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")

Discussion point 3: Should people publishing accusations against others on their blogs or Facebook pages be held responsible if they disseminate false information (e.g., fake news, anti-vax content)?

Class Activity 2: Freedom of speech and public good

Hate Speech

Free Speech and Hate Speech

- Social media and the Internet have opened up for many new arenas for exchanging opinions.

- Freedom of speech is an absolute value in any democracy, both for the public and for the media.

- At the same time, opinions and debates challenge us as hate speech are spread widely and frequently on new platforms for publishing.

- Hate speech may cause fear and can be the reason why people withdraw from the public debate
    - Women and minority groups most affected

Reddit Banned FatPeopleHate

- Reddit introduced a new anti-harassment policy

- Reddit banned a handful of its worst communities, saying: "Our goal is to enable as many people as possible to have authentic conversations and share ideas and content on an open platform"

- Prominent is the removal of r/fatpeoplehate, a forum devoted to posting (among other things) pictures of overweight people for ridicule.

- They said "They are banning behaviors or ideas"
  - Banning policy was based on specific instances of harassment rather than general offensiveness

Reddit Banned FatPeopleHate

- Deciding which subreddits engage in harassment is going to be a difficult problem, especially because it's hard to even agree on what constitutes harassment — and that assumes everyone involved is acting in good faith, which almost certainly won't be the case.

Discussion Point 4: Are platform enforced measures successful in reducing hate speech and harassment?

Without Steve Wynn, Casino Empire Risks Losing More Than a Name

Twitter Reports First Quarterly Profit, Despite User Stagnation

The Stock Market Is Worried About Inflation. Should It Be?

PepsiCo Dips Its Toes Into the Sparkling Water Market

Rising Hummus Prices? Blame a Drought Half a World Away

PAID POST: DESTINATION CANADA
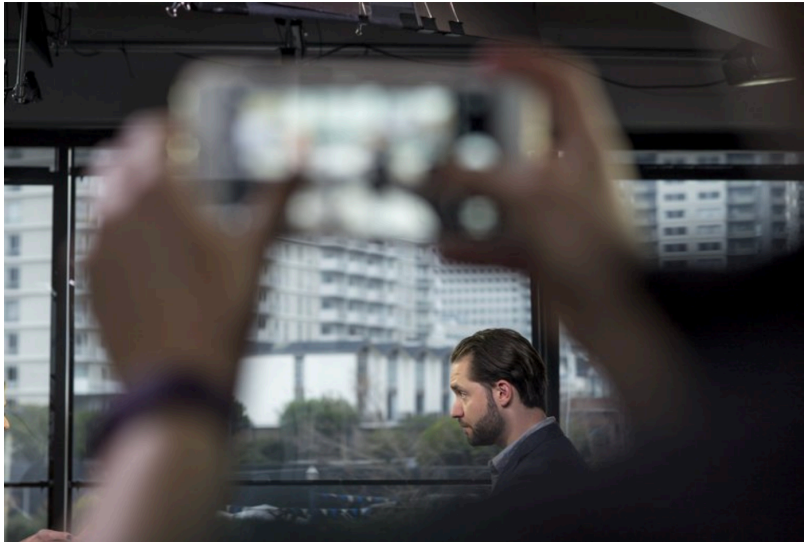Why Quebec City Is North America's Culture Capital

CANADA
KEEP EXPLORING

STATE
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BUSINESS DAY

Reddit Limits Noxious Content by Giving Trolls Fewer Places to Gather

The Shift

By **KEVIN ROOSE**   SEPT. 25, 2017

Alexis Ohanian, a founder of the website, which banned several forums in 2015 as part of a broad crackdown on poisonous behavior. David Paul Morris/Bloomberg

There are — and always have been, and probably always will be — trolls, scoundrels and reprobates on the internet.

It is a problem that has vexed multibillion-dollar corporations and the smartest computer programmers in the world. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have all declared war on abuse and harassment, spent years training sophisticated algorithms and hired vast armies of moderators to root out hateful content.

And yet, the trolls persist.

But what if a better way of combating online toxicity were right under our

TECH

Why Eating Disorders Are So Hard For Instagram And Tumblr To Combat

Over the last four years, the social media platforms have done a lot to curb content that promotes self-injury. But they'll never fully succeed. Is it worth trying?
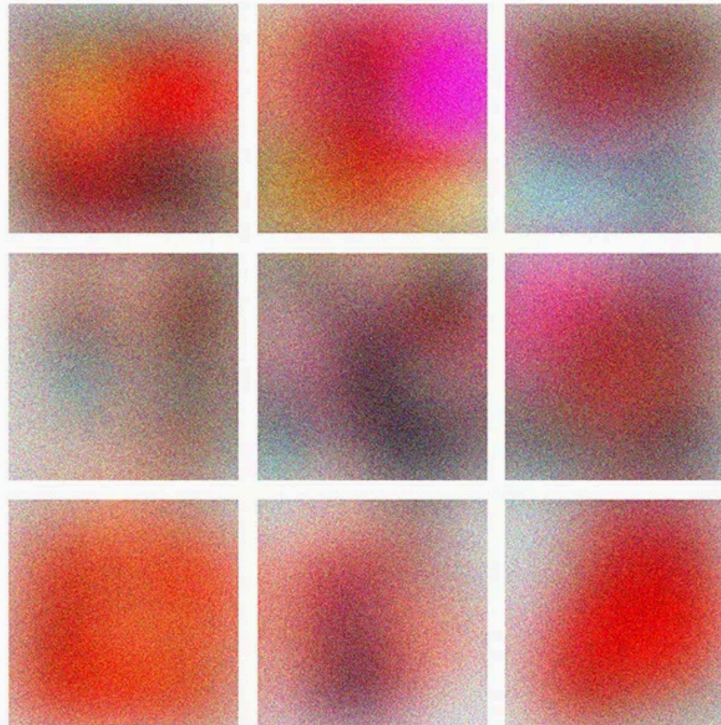
Posted on April 14, 2016, at 2:01 p.m.

Stephanie M. Lee
BuzzFeed News Reporter

Hate Speech and Free Speech on Campuses

- Do officials and administrators have the right to discipline, punish, or expel students based on the content of their social media posts?

- Student Conduct Code: students can be punished for derogatory speech "while on university premises or at university sponsored or supervised events" (Yeasin v. University of Kansas)

- [High] school officials could censor school-sponsored student speech if they had a legitimate educational reason for doing so (Hazelwood Sch. Dist. v. Kuhlmeier)

- High school students vs. college students

Spam

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

Spam

- 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

Class Activity 3:
Case Study on Spam

Discussion point 5: Why is "cold calling" considered to be an acceptable sales practice, but spamming isn't?