CS 4873 Computers, Society, and Professionalism

Spring 2021

**Section Discussion Guide**

Week 6

1. Questions
   * Remember each class to bring a question, observation or relevant news item for discussion.
   * Go around the video chat and share these. If you have a relevant news item that relates to censorship or hate speech, feel free to bring it up during those discussions.
2. Discussion 1: Internet Censorship
   * 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” – the First Amendment)
   * Should people publishing accusations against others/unsubstantiated content on their blogs or Facebook pages be held responsible if they disseminate false information (e.g., political misinformation around the elections)?
     1. Sometimes people are unintentional in what they share – take the case of people sharing misinformation on Covid-19 (ref. <https://www.zdnet.com/article/coronavirus-misinformation-is-increasing-newsguard-finds/> ). There’s a ton of information floating on social media on magic cures and medically unverified, alternate treatment/prevention information. Should individuals sharing this information during a global crisis be penalized by platforms?
     2. What are the downsides and upsides of doing so?
   * Should social media companies put a warning on articles that are false?
     1. What about statements made by politicians?
     2. Should they fact check political ads?
3. Discussion 2: Hate Speech

Facebook banning Alex Jones and Milo Yiannopoulos. TA to ask students to pull up the following link: <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/03/719897599/facebookbans-alex-jones-louis-farrakhan-and-other-dangerous-individuals>

* + Background
    1. Alex and Milo have been widely banned from the internet
       1. Reportedly can’t even use Uber.
       2. Alex is guilty of, for example, of claiming Sandy Hook never happened and attacking bereaved parents as hired actors
       3. Milo ‘dog whistled’ his followers to attack actress Leslie Jones in the wake of controversy over the movie Ghost Busters
    2. Legally: the government can’t block your free speech, but social media platforms can do what they want
  + Did Facebook do the right thing in banning Alex and Milo?
  + Did Facebook and Twitter do the right thing in banning Trump? Do world leaders and other “news worthy” people warrant special treatment?
  + How do we balance one person’s right to free speech and another person’s right to be free from harassment?
  + How do you feel about the fact that Alex and Milo are banned from most of the internet?
    1. Is this different than people just banned from one platform?
  + How do you feel about Reddit closing hate subreddits like r/fatpeoplehate and r/coontown?
    1. Is this the same question as Alex Jones being banned from the internet, or different?
    2. Did Reddit do the right thing?
  + Are platform-enforced measures successful in reducing hate speech and harassment?

1. Introduce the readings for next week