Introduction

Think about a library that claims to have books about sports, but when you go there, all they have are books about soccer. Or how about a fruit market that only sells apples. What if all the fruit markets only sold apples because all the fruit markets were owned by the same company?

The Constitution prohibits Congress from making a law that prohibits free speech.

Does a private company, like Google, have a right to prohibit free speech, or does Google have an obligation to the public to provide a forum that is free from arbitrary censorship?

Background

Google is the most used search engine, accounting for about 75% of all internet searches (NetApplications, 2018). Users can search for information on almost any topic. YouTube, which is owned by Google, accounts for almost 80% of multimedia and video site visits (Statista, 2016). Based on their market dominance, Google/YouTube are in a position to control distribution of information and media.

Google/YouTube uses algorithms that are designed to help users find the most likely answer for their search (Google). A problem arises, though, when Google/YouTube software developers allow their own bias to influence search results. A big issue right now is the claim that Google/YouTube is using its market dominance to stifle conservative viewpoints. “When Google's employees or algorithms decide to block our access to information about a news item, political candidate or business, opinions and votes can shift, reputations can be ruined and businesses can crash and burn” (Epstein, 2016).

This issue is working its way through the United States District Court for the Northern District of California in the case of Prager University against Google and YouTube. Prager University makes educational videos that are mostly seen on YouTube, but lately, some of their videos have either been removed or have been demonetized. Prager University argues that the only reason their videos have been removed or demonetized is because of unlawful censorship.

Thesis

Google, which has monopolistic market control, should not censor free speech by restricting content because people should be able to hear both sides of an argument so that they can make up their own minds, Google should not infringe on the right of people making money using Google’s open-ended platform, and Google is dishonest about their bias.

Google should not censor free speech by restricting content because people should be able to hear both sides of an argument so that they can make up their own minds.

* Our founding fathers recognized the importance of free speech in society. The First Amendment precludes Congress from making a law that abridges the freedom of speech, or of the press. Philosopher John Stuart Mills argued that the “marketplace of ideas” is essential to liberty because truth will emerge from open debate (as cited in Ingber, 1984). If only one side of an argument is available through sites like Google, liberty is at risk.
* Google already provides certain search controls. These controls include parental controls and restricted mode. Parents are in the best position to decide for both themselves and their children about what they want to read or watch. Restricted mode allows organizations, like STEM, to restrict access to certain websites while prohibiting access to other websites.
* Counter Argument: People are too stupid to censor bad content on their own, and they need Google to do it for them.

Google should not infringe on the right of people making money using Google’s open-ended platform.

* The creator of an informational video or other type of content will lose the opportunity to monetize if Google censors their content.
* Advertisers that have links on pages that are restricted by Google lose the chance to advertise and sell their product.
* Counter Argument: Because Google is providing the service, Google should be able to decide which videos or other content are advertiser friendly.

Google should not have a platform that appears to be unbiased, when they are in fact promoting their own ideas.

* If Google wants to promote a particular viewpoint, they should be honest about it and not pretend that they offer all viewpoints. In describing their mission, Google states, “We believe that society works best when it provides a space for all voices to be heard, and that our users are best served when they have access to a breadth of diverse content from a variety of sources” (Google).
* Google is merely a conduit through which information should flow, not a filter of information, but Google acknowledges that it skews searches by restricting hate speech (Google). Once again, the question is how to best define “hate speech.”
* In the case of *Prager University vs. Google Inc. and YouTube, LLC*, Prager University argues that “Google/YouTube use[s] their restricted mode filtering not to protect younger or sensitive viewers from ‘inappropriate’ video content, but as a political gag mechanism to silence Prager [University] . . . . This is speech discrimination plain and simple: censorship based entirely on the perceived identity and political viewpoint of the speaker not on the content of the speech.”

Conclusion and Recommendation

Because Google/YouTube has a monopoly on search engines for information and multimedia, they should not censor free speech through their algorithms or otherwise. Further, Google should say if they are censoring websites and videos with full transparency. If Google/YouTube censors content in the future, they should provide an unambiguous statement on why the content was restricted. Freedom of speech, including the right to publish on the internet, is a foundation to a free society.