Brandon Patton

D. GOING VIRAL

I. Task 2.

The situation of Alfie Evans grew to popularity in UK social media hemispheres and became a worldwide concern through the workings of Facebook. Following the hospital’s declination of further care for Alfie, and the family’s denial of access to other countries’ facilities, Facebook groups were formed out of support for Alfie and his family and shared at a massive scale. These groups garnered many forms of support for the Evans, even offering to physically deliver items to them or providing substantial financial support. Influential figures in other countries even used Alfie as a political basis for discussion. Despite the fervent support, Alfie passed away and the Evans family subsequently ended their social media presence altogether and told supporters to simply “return back to your everyday lives.” The way the Evans family’s social media presence evolved to such heights of support and lengths other people would go for their benefit was greatly enhanced by the use of Facebook groups. Since Facebook had changed its algorithm to recommend more personal news than traditional news during Alfie’s struggle, it caused Alfie support groups to be shared at an increased rate and by more people. This massive influx of supporters bolstered the Evans’ social media presence, causing their son’s life to be on display for the world to see.

II. Task 3

1. The Evan’s family was able to enjoy many forms of public support through the social media exposure, even garnering financial donations over £100,000 in total. The viral social media involvement with Alfie Evans gave his family new avenues of care for their son and broadened the amount and kind of support they received.
2. Most of Alfie’s life was documented and shared with thousands if not millions of people he and his family would never meet. His life became a public concern and although much genuine support was garnered as a result, it is questionable to broadcast the life of any child on the scale Alfie’s was. The various protests and violence that broke out in response to shifts in Alfie’s situation were clear threats to public safety and to those in the same hospital. In a lot of ways, it illustrates the threat of mob mentality and how its facilitated in some ways by environment of social media.
3. Facebook may have expected some sort of increase in presence in various local groups between family and friends but could not have accurately predicted the scale in which any one social media venture would spread. They could have tested the change in the algorithm on large amounts of data to see how it would influence the connectedness of large populations, but I doubt it would be capable of being explicitly accurate to real life events to a point of reasonable extrapolation.
4. From the perspective of Alfie’s parents, I would have been against allowing personal matters such as my son’s struggle to live to be on display for so many unknown people. Once it was clear that Alfie was decided to not receive care from multiple institutions, the rest of his life should have been away from the eyes of social media. Although meant well, no amount of support was going to save Alfie from his diagnosis. Despite possibly knowing this, some users decided to share and support anyway to benefit their public image. The inter-sharing within communities and their respective dynamics that motivate certain members into action when confronted with a situation like Alfie’s deserves investigation.

I pledge my honor that I have abided by the Stevens Honor System

Brandon Patton