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Weekly Ethicacy - Government Regulation on Social Media

Should the government intervene and regulate user engagement tools employed by social media companies such as notifications, suggestions, personalized ads/suggestions, and other intrusive methods to pull user attention to themselves? Social media is addicting. Social media is a huge money maker in today's society. One way they make money is by keeping users engaged and active on their content for as long as possible. Some people are comparing today's addiction to social media like the addiction to tobacco. In previous years the government needed to step in and regulate what information Big Tobacco companies are able to send out in the media, considering how harmful their products are. Prior to the government stepping in some people were not aware that tobacco was addictive. Social media is just as addicting and individuals as well as companies are able to send out whatever they want. Certain industries can't run rampant without any rules being enforced. Popular video platforms like TikTok and YouTube have also been brought to concern for employing algorithmic recommendation systems that can lead viewers down dangerous and addictive rabbit holes. Over half of the adults in the U.S believe that the government should step in to regulate social media platforms. Fake news has been posted all over the internet leading to misinformation spread across the country. The major controversy was when news about voter fraud spread like wildfire leading to the events on January 6th. This ultimately led to former president, Donald Trump being banned on Twitter.

Side: **The government should not regulate social media**

Social media is such a unique market that we cannot use traditional measurements to regulate it and define it is a monopoly. Currently as designed our government would not be able to effectively regulate the market due to its “network effects”. The value of most social media is in its user base and their experience on their platform¹. The government cannot just break them up, have them allow for third party applications, or apply any other traditional anti monopolistic tactic to fix this supposed problem. The market in fact will begin to regulate itself based on people’s wants for more control of their data. You can see this in recent Apple and Google privacy updates, which have given the user more control over their data and tracking²³. This has hurt some advertising, but is an example of the market forces naturally balancing a system not the government taking the action. This connects to the next point that the burden will be too great on the individual companies who may have to change their business model or stop providing their service in markets with too many regulations⁴⁵. This is already happening in Europe and hurting the bottom lines of social media companies who currently are some of the largest high paying employers in the world and US. We need high paying jobs and any regulations put in place can have a grand impact on this industry and the high paying jobs it supports. I believe also users have some level of responsibility when looking at social media and its tools of engagement. They agree to the data collections to access the service as well as they have the ability to control notifications and some personalized information that is presented in the apps⁶. If people restrict notifications and use other apps they can individually manage their social media addiction without impacting others or asking the government to regulate another market they cannot regulate. Lastly most users view personalized ads as useful and an important piece in the overall experience on the social media platform⁷. They want to use the app they deem useful and much of the “use” derived in social media is from their personalized

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<https://dailytrojan.com/2021/01/21/the-curious-case-of-the-social-media-marketplace-why-the-free-market-cannot-regulate-big-tech/>

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<https://www.cato.org/policy-analysis/why-government-should-not-regulate-content-moderation-social-media#arguments-for-public-regulation-of-social-media>

³ <https://twitter.com/Fortune500/status/1535350118425235456>

⁴ <https://twitter.com/Fortune500/status/1535350118425235456>

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https://think-ing-com.cdn.ampproject.org/v/s/think.ing.com/amp/article/social-media-companies-face-perfect-storm/?amp_gsa=1&_js_v=a9&usqp=mq331AQKKAFQArABIIACAw%3D%3D#amp_tf=From%20%251%24s&aoh=16679393292726&referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com&share=https%3A%2F%2Fthink.ing.com%2Farticles%2Fsocial-media-companies-face-perfect-storm%2F

6

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/amyblaschka/2020/09/21/this-is-why-you-need-to-turn-off-social-media-notifications/?sh=4966244c6690>

⁷ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7358266/#sec6>

touches for each user. So there are techniques social media companies employ to pull the user in more and could possibly lead to addiction, it is not the government's job to step in and ruin the experience and usefulness of Social media for all.