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Ethics 289

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Assignment #4

3.30

As it stands currently, University of North Dakota does not maintain any restrictions on the internet's use on campus. There are restrictions, however, to certain behaviors listed in the Acceptable Use Policy, which can be found at <https://und.edu/student-life/housing/resnet/usepolicy.cfm>. Although this policy is focused on students living on campus, the behaviors listed include activities which are prohibited by anyone using a wireless connection.

I found this policy interesting because it did not prohibit watching porn on individual computers which is a common restriction when using computers in public locations.

This situation is remarkably similar to Yahoo being sued by the French government for Nazi memorabilia being available. Porn and other sites that should be considered inappropriate for a public location are easily accessed. In the Yahoo case, Nazi memorabilia was easily accessible. The difference between these two cases is in France, Nazi memorabilia was against the law and on campus watching porn is not against any rule.

Seeing the result of the Yahoo case (it was dragged out and never resolved), I think the school has found a good middle ground. The school policy draws the line between personal computer rights and improper use of computers on campus. The campus police would have a hard time controlling the content of everyone's computer without blocking potentially useful sites. Instead, it relies on the integrity of the students to make good decisions and avoid potentially harmful or dangerous websites. I think they made the right decision with this policy as a student because it would be very annoying to deal with not just a security key but online filters when doing research, however I can avoid websites with things I don't want to see.

The lawsuit between a German murderer who served his time vs. Wikipedia to remove details of his public case brings up several interesting issues about freedom of speech and privacy. These same issues are obvious in several other countries as well.

For example, the man's case was a public one, allowing space for people to assume the details of that case could be recorded with Wikipedia. Legally, this is the correct assumption. Unfortunately, the life after prison time served would be drastically different with the mistakes of his past hanging over his head. Although the details of his case were recorded in the public records, rarely do people look into the files of the government (even if they are open to the public). Wikipedia, however, is a widely used and accepted site for somewhat reliable information. This man's ability to shake of his past would be drastically impaired if Wikipedia maintained his record because more people are likely to search and find information about the murder committed.

On a similar note, China is known for its extensive internet restrictions and censorship. According to a study done by the Human Rights Watch, China has several layers of protection from the outside internet. This is the opposite problem of the German man's case, whose worry was his privacy was at risk. In this situation, Freedom of Speech is significantly restricted.

It is no secret China has strong restrictions, however I was surprised to learn their security comes in various layers. First, "forbidden keywords and URLs are plugged into Internet routers at the ISP level, thus controlling data flows between the user and the IAP" (1). Additionally, software backs up this security wall on the ISP level and the government works to build censorship into the Internet infrastructure itself (1).

Comparing China, a country that restricts freedom of speech, and the United States, which is the epitome of freedom of speech, it becomes obvious there needs to be a little of both. The ability for people to request information about themselves from social sites should be maintained.

Google and other large internet businesses do not provide a threat to Freedom of Speech - yet. For the most part, the governments and legislatures of all countries are who decides what will be displayed or not on the internet. If you are looking for data to support a certain topic, you can always find it at one site or another unless it is data restricted by your government. According to an article on CNN Money, Google censors internet sites based on government requirements. For example:

“...In Turkey, Google takes down links to sites that defame the country's founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk -- that's illegal there. In Thailand, denigrating the Thai monarch is against the law, so Google blocks YouTube videos in Thailand that ridicule King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

And in Germany, France and Poland, where it is illegal to publish pro-Nazi material or content that denies the Holocaust, Google does not display links to certain sites on its search results pages.

Governments asked Google to remove 39,374 items from its search results, YouTube and other sites in 2013, according to the company's most recent [transparency report](#).

On top of that, copyright holders asked Google to take down 36.5 million links, videos and other items”(2).

Even if Google decided to censor information that wasn't requested by the government, there are other search sites available. For example, Yahoo, Bing, Ask, and AOL are among the top search engines other than Google.

It would be ill advised to ignore how Google has become the most popular search engine currently in use. Although it doesn't have complete control over the internet, some worry it could soon. According to Burleson Consulting, “If the courts rule that Google has the right to do whatever they want without having to justify it, they would have supreme power over the web. Google might wind-up governing the whole Internet and have life-and-death power over companies that rely on the web for advertising”(3). It is important we support and regulate all businesses so Google and other companies don't monopolize the internet.

When the new Net Neutrality rules were passed by the FCC and put into play November of 2011, many people were unhappy. In these laws included the following regulations:

“First, transparency: fixed and mobile broadband providers must disclose the network management practices, performance characteristics, and commercial terms of their broadband services.

Second, no blocking: fixed broadband providers may not block lawful content, applications, services, or non-harmful devices; mobile broadband providers may not block lawful websites, or block applications that compete with their voice or video telephony services.

Third, no unreasonable discrimination: fixed broadband providers may not unreasonably discriminate in transmitting lawful network traffic”(4).

Basically, wireless and wired internet connections were treated differently in these new regulations. One reason for this is the difference between the two industries. Wireless internet is separate entity entirely from wired internet connections – it does not require the same technology (routers, etc). Specifically, net neutrality

“prohibit[s] cable, fiber and DSL broadband companies from blocking websites, allow users to use the software and devices of their choice, and require companies to be transparent if they use traffic-management software. Mobile-internet companies would have to abide by a lesser standard, but are prohibited from blocking VOIP applications like Skype or video services like YouTube or Netflix that compete with their own offerings” (6).

One thing I do not agree with is the ability for cable, fiber, and broadband companies to sell faster internet for a higher price. According to the FCC rules in 2011, it was not made clear whether this could happen or not. The laws they passed were not specific enough, mostly because the democrats and republicans had to avoid specificity to come to an agreement. Also, wireless connections are treated differently because, according to the FCC, they require the option to block websites that are slow. I don't agree

with this aspect of the laws. My view is the internet should stay completely open, regardless of the speeds available. Also, it should not be commercialized for companies to make a profit for faster service. Many companies claim normal internet speeds would stay the same, they would just offer a faster option for more money, which is hard to believe. As soon as companies pass the legislation to be able to split internet speeds, people will have to start paying more and more.

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