Short Assignment Two

           Platforms are moderated by algorithms, employees, and even outside sources such as political figures. Platform moderation can be defined as the content that a platform moderates and what they decide to do with the posts, such as allowing or removing it. Without moderation, digital platforms (and people) have too much freedom, and anybody can post whatever they please. As Tarleton Gillespie said in Custodians of the internet: Platforms, content moderation, and the hidden decisions that shape social media, platforms must make decisions that don’t alter the user’s experience. Examples of content moderation that are standard across most platforms are nudity, pornography, racial and ethnic hatred, animal torture, and graphic obscenities, to name a few. This type of moderation is okay with most of the general public. However, some feel that nudity should be moderated differently (such as differentiating sexually explicit and pornographic). These content types are usually monitored by an algorithm that looks for keywords and similar content or by an employee.

           The government also has a role with moderation, such as restricting and allowing what platforms can or cannot censor. One government that has a lot of control over many major US platforms is the Chinese government. A Chinese company, Tencent, has stakes in many large companies such as WeChat, Discord, and Reddit. At one point, there was a photo of Xi Jinping (President of China) being compared to Winnie the Pooh circulating the internet, especially Reddit. Jinping didn’t like this and had all social media sites take down the photo. This shows the kind of power a political figure like Jinping has. Although this is an example of a more extreme moderation, it is moderation nonetheless, as the platform permits it. As mentioned earlier, platforms should monitor and remove some content such as child pornography. Not only is it illegal, but it also shouldn’t be viewed, and most of the general public agrees.

           With the rise of social networks in the early 21st century, platforms were looking for new ways to innovate and offer different features from other platforms. An example of this is Friendster. Friendster was designed to compete with match.com, an online dating site whose focus was to let people meet friends of friends. It gained traction, and tons of people were interested in it until Friendster couldn’t handle the large traffic, which led to the restriction of activities. Although the Boyd and Ellison article didn’t say what kind of activities were restricted, this is considered a type of platform moderation. The type of content a platform moderates (emphasizing what they delete) determines the type of platform it may be. For example, suppose Facebook were to delete many pornographic posts but kept terrorist-like posts. In that case, it tells you that Facebook doesn’t care about the user’s safety and is probably not a safe platform to use. Moderation is necessary but only to a certain extent and should protect its users' safety and well-being.

References

Boyd, Danah m., and Nicole B. Ellison. “Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship.” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2007, pp. 210–230., doi:10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x.

Gillespie, Tarleton. *Custodians of the Internet: Platforms, Content Moderation, and the Hidden Decisions That Shape Social Media*. Yale University Press, 2018.