

To: Professor Mann

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Subject: First Amendment Questions and the Digital World

Date: 05/26/2024

1. As a citizen of this great country, I am able to procure information from various sources ranging from online articles, social media platforms, and literature such as newspapers. Different providers for this information include: CNN, NBC, ABC, FOX, The New York Times, and Washington Post to name a few. With the age of technology, social media platforms have opened up a vast world for many to also share opinionated information or even fact based information depending on the sources they provide. Facebook, Snapchat, Tiktok, and X (formerly known as twitter) provides forums connecting the world to each other and allowing for a mass dissemination of information. As far as information about current events and issues, to a degree I believe we are informed, but not well-informed because bias can be a factor in all of the sources mentioned above. The information may be given, but the information could always be derivative and manipulated in support of different agendas. Fact checking has become a practice that is needed so that the user searching for correct information can distinguish between what is true or false. National Public Radio (NPR) and British Broadcasting Channel (BBC News) are two sources that I generally trust when obtaining information about current events. I do feel as though bias does exist within them, but not to the degree of FOX or CNN. Using these sources for information, I can then gather my own thoughts and opinions by researching the topics on sites such as Google Scholar to formulate a well-rounded idea of what is actually happening around the world.
2. Based upon the American Library Association (ALA) it is described that the first amendment keeps the government from having any role regarding removal or restriction of content. With the first amendment, we as a society are able to freely speak and publish information without fear of being censored by the government. However, there are some limitations about what content can be posted, as unprotected speech, to include “obscenity, child pornography, defamatory speech, false advertising, true threats, and fighting words” (*First Amendment and censorship* 2021) can be regulated by the government.
3. Social media platforms used to be platforms for information sharing without the need to be regulated. With on-going concerns regarding the spread of misinformation and hateful information, many are looking towards the companies to implement regulations or policies to help mitigate these concerns. Recently, it has been seen that fact-checking tools have been made and content warnings have been used for material that can be potentially triggering or harmful (Yaraghi, 2023). These private entities do have the potential to censor the material as they see fit, but are trying to moderate their forums the best they can without infringing on people’s rights.

4. At the University of Iowa, guest speaker Chloe Cole was invited to speak on campus regarding their transition to being a male, and then detransitioning back to Male. The speaker was to speak on their experiences and how they feel about the transgender movement. The conservative student group organized this event, but to much of their dismay, had backlash from the University Democrats. Flyers were made, chalk advertisements were placed on campus, and it seemed as though the advertisements were in place without any issues. However, the Democrats began to tear down the flyers and erase the advertisements in hopes of keeping Chloe Cole from coming to campus and speaking. I believe this response was not warranted and was not appropriate as they went against university policy and ultimately infringed upon the rights of the conservative student group. The University of Iowa policy states “all student groups have a right to invite speakers to campus, as well as hang flyers and chalk campus sidewalks. It is prohibited for other students to vandalize or remove those messages,” (Kurten, 2023). The Democrats violated university policy by vandalizing the advertisements that were posted. Further into the story, it is seen that the democrats wanted to do this in order to keep the campus safe from hate speech and violence, but with this, they disregarded the rights that others hold.
5. Overall, I believe that advances in technology and the internet have strengthened public discourse and democratic processes to some degree. Society has access to information around the clock and from all over the world, rather than being hindered by local news or national news from newspapers or in-person forums. The rise of social media has connected everyone and allows for information to be shared, albeit requiring research in order to validate the information. However, with advancements in Artificial Intelligence (AI), content is being generated at an alarming rate and needs to be reviewed to ensure credibility. AI generated content can be viewed as an issue because AI can produce and spread misinformation (*The risks of AI-generated content: What you need to know* 2023). Furthermore, the more we use chatbots that use AI, a disconnect from human interaction can be apparent and hurt actual public discourse and mislead people depending on the information the AI gathers and distributes during the conversations.

REFERENCES

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