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Unit 1 Writing Assignment

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To All Social Media Users,

I often wonder where the line is drawn between individual rights and social responsibility, as it relates to uploaded social media content.

So long ago now it seems I borrowed my friends Radio Shack TRS 80, so long ago, in the 1980's. I knew this was going to be big. The first computer I can remember that connected to the internet was the Commodore 64 in the 1990's, and I knew, this was going to be even bigger. I was not wrong it went thru the roof. The first connections were more like global chatrooms and everything was on a DOS (Disk Operating System) before windows came in and webpages were born. So long, long ago, and now so very big.

Information was mostly on TV, especially news. What we used to get online were games, chatrooms, and some information websites that appeared as data or was digitized. I saw my old encyclopedias becoming antique, so outdated. The medium became as dusty as the books themselves. It was all down load, down load, down load. Then one day, almost happening spontaneously, like a sunflower bloom, an individual could upload. A subtle but major change. And it all got bigger again, and the world became truly connected and it got smaller. It was amazing but also dangerous.

It was YouTube that interested me, and what was being done on it. It reminded me of when MTV first began. MTV was a significant change on how people enjoyed their music. Indeed, video did kill the radio star. And what was scoffed at initially, became a necessity for musicians to adapt or die. Most musicians took it as a whole new medium with creative control. Now for them the eyes and the ears of their fans were accessible, not just their ears, or briefly their eyes as in a live concert. Some received significant pushback on their productions because of a commentary contained within.

I recall initial content of the average YouTube user as mostly VLOGS, a kind of video diary. Many just uploaded their vacations, they just did so with an audience in mind. Some took it to another level with clever editing and videography. The advent of GoPro cameras, drones, and cell phone cameras. Supplied those interested in sharing with the right equipment for the job. One could see that it was enviable that this platform would venture into social commentary. This commentary went beyond, and again the audio visual dominated. The old political cartoons became memes lampooning a politician or a social condition. But how many people would listen,

and to who. And who would be influenced in to some action by the content. What would you think as being the most important information channeling? The same as I probably, no doubt, the political arena, and our elected officials and lawmakers. Essentially those who control us.

It is clear, the explosion of online platforms will require the application of the ideals of the First Amendment to the modern communication technology. The speed of uploaded content created the need for censorship. There was clear evidence because of accurate tracking of where, who, when, and how long they observed content, indicated the ability for total control of the platform by its owners.

So how do we define this moment in our time? The president at the White House social media summit described it as “When historians look back at this time, they will see that many of the biggest news stories of our era were totally ignored. I — I can tell you that I deal with the media, and the spin they put on it — or sometimes they’ll leave it out, and then if there’s something slightly negative, they’ll make it, you know, headline news. They’ll put it down as headline news. Or even covered up by the media — they were broken up by citizens”. In this idea the President was describing what is now referred to as “fake news” and how their monopoly was broken up by social media. The President believed that the mainstream media was against him. And that online social media content, in particular YouTube, helped get out the truth. He believed the unbiased content, that tended to hold him in a favorable light was being uploaded by independent “non agenda” driven persons.

The court realized the importance of being connected in social media. And case law in *Packingham v. North Carolina*, a case that went to highest court, the Supreme Court, who decided social media is a public square, and an essential liberty. So important they could not deny it to a convicted sex offender, who could troll sites possibly again for their next victim. Can someone in a public square be removed for speaking their mind? Should they be removed? You can walk ten minutes in Times Square to hear a speech that advocates racism or hate. You can take another ten minutes and find a conspiracy theorist, another ten and find a religious person predicting the end of the world. Yes, they should be allowed to do this, it is a right as it is your right to decide whether or not you want to listen.

Recent legislation by presidential executive order, can pull back that curtain of immunity by identifying the fact that if YouTube, restricts widely distributed money-making original content. Then YouTube has become a “publisher” by selectively denying that content, therefore they will now also become responsible for bad user content being uploaded and remaining available. YouTube would like to keep steering advertising and react to complaints by selective enforcement, while retaining immunity. You cannot have it both ways.

Watch TV! Really cruise the channels, and the bias is evident. The divide between political parties is startling. Ask yourself, really, ask yourself. Until this presidency the news was purporting itself to be just that, news. You would catch a bit of an information spin but subtle not outright. How about now? Ask yourself again. Its blatant, some shows content cannot go 5mins without a negative opinion of a party. Some, actually many, total content is a full 30mins of bashing. Is this what the media has developed into? How can we actually say this is reliable

unbiased journalism? The answer is we cannot! It isn't! They are owned by a corporation who dictates the marching orders. Recently a mainstream news outlet spun the story so divergent from the truth, that a defamation suit was finally brought forward. And would you have guessed it...they lost, and settled for an undisclosed large amount. We need the virtual town square. We deserve the virtual town square. We need the good and the bad, so we can sort out what we believe in. We do not need someone looking out for our best interests. Why do I think this is important, I will tell you, because from my observation that side being smothered does that not have the upper hand in favorability within the main stream media arena. Out of necessity it must react to keep the information flow balanced. They struggle to maintain their voice.

Men and women including all of whatever identity, have survival instinct and inherent common sense. Why must we be considered malleable masses? I ask you why? Sure, go the other route its for the protection of children. Think, children these days are still in a generation where their online presence is superior to that of their parents. They will be exposed to what could be considered bad or destructive content.... No Matter What. What are the parents doing about this? Handing off their responsibilities to the government or a tech company that's what. The youth will be exposed to it one way or another, haven't we had our fill with over policing. Do we want the same in our politics, our religion, our ethics, our morays, our compassion, our information... all filtered?

Perhaps this seems like nothing now, but that acorn growing ignored, will become hardwood oak tree. Again, what is worse information depravation or saturation. Out of the worst of the two evils, I say it is to be information starved. It's a long slow painful death. You cannot make a good decision without good facts. Yet we still will be asked to vote and make those decisions. Is it really the right one we make? Or are we all living in the illusion of a Democratic Republic. Is it an illusion that we are really in control, who is in control if we are not, and if that is true what they are doing?

I believe in free-flowing content. Again, money has corrupted a viable creator's platform. In a June 2019 Times article by Roose, Kevin and Kate Conger explains, "more than 500 hours of new videos are uploaded every minute — has made it difficult for the company to track rule violations. And the company's historically lax approach to moderating extreme videos has led to a drumbeat of scandals, including accusations that the site has promoted disturbing videos to children and allowed extremist groups to organize on its platform. In YouTube's automated advertising system has paired offensive videos with ads from major corporations, prompting several advertisers to abandon the site". YouTube claims that that the shock value or extreme views were automatically channeled by a person's viewing habits to bring up site numbers. In deed as a channel owner gets hits both the owner and YouTube make money. So, they address the issue by tweaking their algorithms, targeting content, and started shadow banning. It is believed thousands of channels will be removed. They begin to enforce and create restrictions to appease their advertisers, their own diagnostic apparatus indicates this. Not with the intention of saving the public. No one should tell a person to get off the soap box no matter what they are saying. Give the public credit and do not treat us like children or consider us ignorant. Open the flow of information and creator's content completely to all but what is clearly, undeniably,

illegal. What is trash in one eye, is art to another. Have the owner label their channel appropriately. Parody, news, creative original, social commentary, etc. Let our legislators consider that option. Controls can be applied at the household level based upon what label the channel is under. If the creator mislabels the channel then some corrective measures may be applied with equity.

An exodus from the platform like Israelites from Egypt could be on the horizon, and that would be a shame. Let the content flow like a stream, with all its bends and curves. But keep it moving. Don't dam it up or it will burst in a heavy torrent. Do not contain information, by caving in to placate someone if their insulted, find it disturbing, or thinks it's racist. We need to know what is out there, to maintain situational awareness. We are smarter than you think, have faith, we don't need another set of parents, or another big brother or sister. With that we only make progress into an Orwellian dystopia.

I close with a slight modification of the words taken from the Declaration of Independence. A prince whose character thus marked by every act of censorship, which may define an information despot is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

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