

The Constructive Use and Destructive Abuse of the Internet: Verbiage and Garbage on Social Media

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Abstract

Principles dictates policies. This appraisal reviews the printed word and deconstructs why constraints on freedom exist for the printed word, yet this is currently lacking in social media. The internet has unleashed a free-for-all on information dispersal, but freedom of expression and its dispersal carries with it the responsibility for statements made and an accountability for the effects on society. Freedom-of speech does not embrace freedom of reach.

Keywords: *Accountability; Freedom, Internet, Media, Responsibility, Writing*

Provenance

The written word does not change. Prior to the discovery of the printing of the bible, original thoughts were hand-written in some form, like clay, papyrus, tree-bark, animal skin or paper for permanence. Subsequent copies were produced by hand and often monitors of 2 (two) or more scribes were employed to ensure manuscript copies were accurate and not changed. This approach is still employed, with a scribe and seven monitors, to produce precise copies on velum (parchment) of the Pentateuch in Judaism. The Guttenberg Bible produced copies on paper for general distribution, and subsequent development of the printing industry, spawned, lubricated, and facilitated the development of global literature.

Production of newspapers, journals, magazines, books, encyclopedias, collections, and libraries of recorded printed works became globally ubiquitous. There was a worldwide creation and distribution of the printed word, but production of copies was constrained by specialized labor and supply of paper and was contained by the risk of financial loss should the printed product not be sold. Although most authors were free to write what they liked, subsequently some form of control (by publishers, editors and distributors for quality of writing, subject matter, veracity of content and intended targets of readership), was accepted and exercised. The most extreme control was authoritarian press-censorship and the ultimate freedom of the press was exercised, from mainstream printed newspapers, from books and journals, to basements mass-producing ephemeral leaflets and pamphlets to be handed out by hand on sidewalks.

With the advent of electricity came the introduction of new media formats and wider outlets and audiences. The radio, followed by the cinema and television, had a parallel explosion of colored printed media. But the ultimate control and constraints deriving from the cost-risk construct of production and responsibility for content in all these media, was similar to-, and transferred from-, the print- media to the new media formats.

At the end of the 20th Century into the 21st Century, with the advent of computers and the internet introducing global unrestricted communication, a new dimension of freedom of expression evolved. With this new-found freedom certain constraining aspects of control transferred from the print media have been moderated.

Aim of the Study

This appraisal deconstructs accountability, and responsibility as it relates to freedom of communication on social media, and stresses why these constraining aspects are necessary for sustaining progress.

Assumption is the mother of all foul-ups: Initially the social media companies (like Google, Twitter, Face-book, Facebook, Tik-Tok and others) allowed complete unrestricted freedom of personal communication from individuals to an unlimited target audience that was deemed as the ultimate expression of freedom of speech. This was an irresistible “free-for-all” format and seemed most desirable for individuals to let themselves be noticed, communicate, and heard in the open media. Long-distance learning, group discussions with face-to-face conversations, retrieval of reliable data from search engines and daily news reports, among many other functions.... *All donned a noble cloak of credibility and trust onto all the internet services.* Internet statements were assumed to be innocent, benign, true, and innocuous, because it was so easy to use and comfortable, quick and cheap to implement this new social media. Often most users were unaware of some unintended consequences. Any and every person had the individual right to their opinions and could disperse these to every person on their media network.

The assumption was that each person would censor their own writing and sustain a sense of decency, morality, and propriety, and also eschew mendacity, offensive language and/or contentious statements, but also that they could maintain anonymity if they so wished, perhaps use pseudonyms, and hide behind the covering cloak of freedom of speech. Opening e-mail addresses with different names was easy without verification of input data. Consequently, this allowed anonymous dispersal of spurious attitudes, notions and factoids without any inherent acceptance of responsibilities for consequences arising from these actions.

Unfortunately, the assumption of noble, respectful, and honest use of the internet media has proved to be false. Within months of use, abuse of the internet manifested. Personal embarrassing pictures posted led to suicides; faux news influenced political demonstrations to invoke violent riots; spurious extremist philosophies provoked delinquent, at best, and fatal at worst, criminal behavior. Among the abusers were established cults, disruptive political movements, dishonest immoral business practices (like illicit drug-dealing, prostitution and child-pornography distribution), all of whom took full advantage of this assumption of anonymity and freedom of expression in communication. Their personal use of the internet was assumed to be their right, not a societal privilege, to communicate without social responsibility or accountability to their fellow human beings.

For centuries promoters of human progress inextricably coupled freedom of choice and action to personal responsibility and accountability to society [1]. Freedom of thought and conscience remains free as it affects an individual. But anything manifesting with physical activity automatically demands the individual accepting responsibility for their actions, and anything emanating from such action. Applied thoughts and actions produce consequences, and those who exercised freedom of choice accept the responsibility for the consequences arising therefrom. Humankind does not live in a vacuum; society provides the wherewithal for people to live, and as such all people owe some form of duty to be part of society. Being accountable for the consequences of your actions is part and parcel of the freedom granted by society to any individual [2].

Discussion

Principles dictate policies. In its' purest form, the principle of freedom of speech and communication is inextricably linked to personal responsibility and social accountability. The owners of Internet servers cannot jettison the personal responsibility and accountability inherent in the exercise of freedom of speech, coupled with the freedom of communication. The owners have the power to constrain, contain or control the information that is distributed through their electronic constructs.... namely the internet that constitutes the social media. This should be responsibly exercised without compromising respect for any freedoms. Some level of discretionary choice, as it relates to responsibility for content, and accountability as it relates to audience reach, is necessary.

Immoral, illegal or anti-social websites, posts, activities, blogs and communications, as adjudged by legal, acceptable social norms of decency, respect and moral conventions, should be vetted, constrained, blocked or eliminated from appearing on the internet. Distribution to large numbers of people, limited to fifty souls, are generally not deemed as private and should be subject to internet service rules and constraints. This is a mild form of censorship which must not be allowed random unfettered dictatorial power, but rather to provide a

reasonable, balanced freedom similar to-, and not different from-, those principles of academic freedoms exercised by higher institutions of learning. This principle impacts the policy of corporate responsibility too, in that internet companies must pay taxes into the coffers of the countries that allow them to function on their territory.

It also applies to Crypto-currency Manipulators (CCMs) who are located within countries with civilized situations that provide and enjoy societal benefits. If CCMs do not pay their due taxes to their hosts and abuse the abstruse nature of the internet to secure anonymity and evade and avoid their fiscal debts and responsibilities.... those CCMs should all be regarded as kleptomaniacs and should not be provided social service benefits like electricity, water supplies, sewage and garbage services, and be brought into community control and accountability. CCMs demand huge amounts of electricity supplies of which are always community based.

Similar criticism may apply to some mega internationally spread-out registered corporations who indulge in economic for-profit-internet commercial activities for financial gain. These companies while rampantly conducting business, legally relocate to lower tax-paying countries to evade paying higher taxes in the countries from which they draw mega-profits.

Concluding Remarks

Credibility and trust have been lost by people using the internet social media services. Faux news, identity theft, abuse of privacy, financial frauds, fallacious propaganda, and a host of other specious activities all press-gang privileges of freedom and eschew the incumbent responsibilities and socially accountable obligations when they indulge in their abuse. The owners of the social internet platforms should reign these perpetrators in, and not allow this abuse of freedom of speech. Recently (2020) most Internet Owners (media enablers and controlling companies) have reluctantly admitted they do have some responsibility to moderate posted hate speech and invective invocation to violence, and consequently have started to exercise some judicious control.

Principles dictate policy. Sound, moral principles ensure sound moral practices. Responsibilities and accountabilities are integral parts of all freedoms. Social media must adhere to moral principles of freedom and exercise ethical constraints of responsibility and just applications of social accountability.

Authors' Statement

The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

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