

We need to regulate Big Tech

In 1969 the government went after IBM for violating the Sherman Act for monopolizing the market on business computers. In the 1980s the government went after Microsoft for monopolizing the PC desktop market. The government did not win either case, but the public did as both companies modified their business models. In both cases the corporations were forced to spend exorbitant amounts of money defending their positions and as always the government spent millions of tax dollars.

The country is faced once again with tech monopolies notably Facebook, Google, Amazon and Twitter. All of these companies provide a service to the public and to the government. The public and government utilize the data collected by these companies and also use Google and Amazon in supporting government operations. But these companies have pushed the boundaries of fair and good business manners.

Google has been proven to manipulate their searches to benefit themselves, their preferred advertisers or their political ideologue. Same goes for Facebook, Twitter and Amazon. These are private companies whose business model has become muddled; data storage and information provider or a media publisher. If they are a media publisher they need to be regulated and treated as such. If they are data and information provider than ownership of the data has to be determined.

The government cannot just stop these corporations or inhibit the corporations from exercising their business goals or stymie invention, but the government does need to start monitoring their activities and enforcing some level of enforcement in regard to individual rights. We as a country cannot let a handful of private citizens determine what is good or evil without public visibility. The tech companies need to publish their rules for membership so that actions on their part can be legally challenged.

Data ownership needs to be maintained by the owners of the accounts. The data cannot belong to the corporations unless granted to them explicitly. Fine print regulations when a customer opens an account or signs up does not cut it. These regulations typically state that if you sign up you agree that we can use your data. The rules need to be more specific and visible. One should be able to declare their pictures or correspondence cannot be shared (specify private or public) or mined for content. That should be the default on account initiation for all transactions, unless the specific content is explicitly exempted from inclusion.

Google Search is part of the lexicon and is a tremendous tool for everyone. But, the search results need to be unfiltered by the provider. Allowing Google to display the results based on an algorithm that is skewed to a preferred conclusion is not providing an honest answer to the query. The user profile should contain the elements to filter a search (exclude information from porn sites, Y or N; English web sites only, Y or N).

None of these corporations should be editing against the First Amendment rights of people, corporations, organizations or institutions. To assist law enforcement there should be a database that identifies terrorists (domestic or foreign) that are a danger to a government or its people. It is not the purview of these companies to make that determination.

While these companies are private they are no longer eligible to remain outside the boundaries of public oversight. Not necessarily government oversight but public oversight. A corporation has a right to determine who is eligible to be a registered account holder, but they may not use race, religion, gender, political affiliation, or any other classification other than the terrorist list provided by the government of each country. This terrorist group is to be a publicly accessed list. The corporations can edit words deemed inappropriate for public view at a PG level. They cannot delete the words only redact the words. Once again the corporations cannot determine which words are offensive the government should maintain that list, again a publicized list. I am sure the historical seven words memorialized by George Carlin could comprise the entire list. This list will have to be different for each country due to language and customs.

These corporations have become so dominant in their market that competition is stifled from entry or strangled from competing. Are there other search engines sure; DuckDuckGo, Bing. Are there other Facebook media sure: Ello, Tumblr. Tired of Twitter there are a few like Flickr, Muzy. Have you heard of the alternatives, probably not. Once a corporation reaches the level of dominance as the big four tech companies mentioned we have allowed ourselves to be controlled and dictated to by a handful of people who may or may not have the same values as you. We should make the determination of what is good or bad, just like we do with a TV show or newspaper; turn the channel or read a different paper. The Tech Companies need adult supervision as they have proved irresponsible in providing honest services.