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CSIT285L - Section 01 – Professor Potasznik

Title includes "Article Version"
or "Scenario #."

CS285L Final Paper: Article Version

With the rapid advancement of the internet, the ability for people to connect with others worldwide has never been easier. While many use this global connectivity for positive purposes, there is little stopping others from exploiting it to expand their criminal activities. Social media platforms are places for both types of connection. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and many more serve as platforms for communication between individuals. Alongside the long-distance friendships and harmless resale marketplaces, these platforms have increasingly enabled solicited drug sales to occur over the internet between strangers. While exploring this issue of rising solicited drug sales online, I will assume the role of a programmer who is a member of a user safety taskforce for a social media company. I'm attempting to make the following decision: to what extent can I, and should I, make these transactions less common? How should I address this dangerous trend?

Preliminary background information

News coverage details the rising rates in student deaths related to fentanyl-laced pills. One article maps out how due to the advancement of the internet and development of social media platforms, "social media has become a superhighway of drugs," making it easier for individuals to solicit drugs online (Bebinger, 2022). With the increase of drug solicitation occurring online, "teen deaths linked to fentanyl have more than doubled since 2019", making this an issue that must be addressed if we wish to reduce the growing number of drug-related deaths (Bebinger, 2022). The identification of social media sites as epicenters of drug dealing is no doubt the impetus for the creation of my taskforce.

Decision maker's role and decision to be made are both explicit and clear by the end of the introduction.

You may, but are not required to use headings to organize your paper.

Any information that came from an outside source is cited in APA format. Direct quotes use quotation marks.

Since news articles won't include a decision to be made or decision maker, use your own creativity to establish those variables for your paper.

Brainstorming

Use the 9.3.1 methodology to frame your arguments.

When making decisions as a programmer for a social media company, it is important to address the potential stakeholders affected by my decisions. For this analysis I will primarily examine parents, students (minors under the age of 18 years old), drug solicitors, and social media companies. While not directly speaking to the outcomes for law enforcement officers and legislators, I will consider previous legislation and how aspects of those laws may apply to potential decisions made in the process. Therefore, while accounting for rights to privacy and freedom of speech, decisions will be made to bring about the greatest good for the greatest number of people and finding the means to do so.

When considering stakeholders involved and the potential benefits and disadvantages they are susceptible to depending on decisions made, using a **utilitarian** analysis serves to find “the greatest good for the greatest number of people” (Potasznik, Day 2). Using a utilitarian approach will help me solve the problem, and perhaps save lives, of thousands of users and families, despite perhaps treading on some individual liberties along the way. In this case, thousands of lives outweigh the privilege of fully being able to express oneself online.

Each class term is in bold, defined, cited, and applied. Each part of the definition is explicitly applied to the topic at hand.

Analyzing parents as stakeholders, the article discusses how everyday parents post stories “of lost teens and young adults who purchased a fake pill” online, showing the increase in concern surrounding this growing phenomenon (Bebinger, 2022). Addressing this issue and reducing unmonitored accessibility to solicited drug sales online serves to benefit parents of children who are susceptible to these solicitations. Parents are right to be concerned for their children’s safety, and they can’t always be in control of what their children see and do. Seeking accountability from social media companies is a logical expectation for parents. However, if

Using the phrase “in this case” is a good way to structure your term application, as it signals the shift from the definition to the application.

Each stakeholder is identified, with both benefits and issues highlighted for them.

parents get used to social media companies stringently regulating their content, they may take that type of private sector vigilance for granted, which would be a mistake. Counting on innumerable websites to ensure a safe environment for children would be far too optimistic and might result in parents further reducing their own attention to what their children see and do. An **abdication of responsibility**, or giving up ones duty to make decisions to a computer (Potasznik, Day 18). In this case, parents are delegating a task they are responsible for (watching, taking care of, and putting limits on their kids) to a technology company, and ultimately an algorithm. At the end of the day, parents are the ones who should take on the responsibility to protect their children. Still, parents may argue that it's harder than ever to keep kids out of trouble, I'll do my best to make that challenge a little easier.

Viewing students, and those under the age of 18 years old as stakeholders, decision making for this may affect their usage of the internet and social media platforms. While minors may enjoy the ability to illegally obtain drugs through social media, the lack of regulation and impurity of the drugs they are obtaining means that reducing that ability only serves to benefit them as a population. The generally allowed age for social media is 13 years old, and while parental controls exist for accounts created by users under the age of 18, this is hardly a practice that minors will willingly accept or opt for. While increased monitoring and surveillance of users under the age of 18 on social media may seem like an infringement of their **4th amendment rights**, which guarantees citizens the right to privacy from the government (Potasznik, Day 4), social media companies are not the government and therefore are not violating constitutional protections of their users if they put their accounts under surveillance. Despite not breaking any laws, some people may still raise eyebrows at such surveillance, but it is one of the most powerful ways to discourage solicited drug sales online is imperative to reduce teen-related

Proofread your paper. Despite doing a great job with content, this student left easy-to-correct spacing issues in their paper, which earned a deduction in the Formatting section of the rubric.

Consider multiple points of view, weighing potential pros and cons for each stakeholder. Even if you eventually dismiss an idea as unethical or unreasonable, its consideration should be apparent.

Terms are fully defined, cited, and applied. If you paraphrase a definition, you don't need quotation marks, but you still need a citation. Using a verbatim definition requires quotation marks.

deaths due to fake pills. Viewing minors as stakeholders in this issue seeks to maximize benefits for this population as we find ways to reduce drug solicitation occurring on social media platforms.

While benefits for drug solicitors is not a concern of mine, acknowledging them as stakeholders due to their free access to solicit drugs online qualifies as a factor when making decisions going forward. With access to countless users online, drug solicitors are able to get in contact with users anywhere. While this is without a doubt very illegal, one might argue that restricting people's usage of the internet may interfere with access to a general **peer-to-peer economy** which allows "sellers to sell directly to buyers" (Potasznik, Day 1). Since this issue does not qualify as a legal form of peer-to-peer economy, finding ways to reduce solicitation of drugs will discourage these acts from occurring in the first place. Therefore, decisions made in this process are at the absolute disadvantage of drug solicitors as we find ways to restrict their access to users on social media platforms. While not infringing upon privacy and rights to freedom of expression, implementing extra measures that discourage the usage of social media for drug solicitation will primarily disadvantage drug solicitors, which is in line with our goal.

All direct stakeholders are considered, not just the popular or easy-to-analyze ones. If discussing regulation of drug sales online, of course people selling drugs will be affected.

Finally social media companies serve as stakeholder as they have a moral and ethical responsibility to reduce the usage of their platforms for illegal activities such as drug solicitation. As of yet, these companies have not been held liable for the illegal transactions carried out on their platforms due to **Section 230 of the CDA within the Telecom Act of 1996**, which states that websites and platforms are not legally responsible for what their users post on the sites (Potasznik, Day 6). Despite that legal benefit in this dangerous phenomenon, though, the companies can't simply ignore a drug epidemic being enabled and carried out on their servers. Aside from public backlash for their negligence, social media companies may be found

This definition is paraphrased; quotation marks are not needed, but the definition is still cited.

complacent for not actively enacting measures to reduce drug solicitation from occurring. As stated before, while social media companies may not be responsible for content posted on their platforms due to section 230, if they are not actively engaging ways to address this issue, they may only be seen as bystanders in a social problem that needs to be addressed. It is on the companies and their programmers to actively put forth measures to monitor and reduce drug solicitation on their platforms and maintain a good reputation in the public eye.

Analysis

To address this issue, I propose four options that serve to reduce the occurrence of drug solicitation on social media platforms, thus reducing teen-related deaths caused by fentanyl-laced pills: identity verification, increased parent monitoring, warnings, or bans.

The first option I propose is the implementation of a mandatory ID verification. While this may bother users of social media platforms who have privacy concerns, implementing an ID verification process serves several purposes. First, implementing an ID-verification would require users to have their identity linked to their account, therefore anyone suspected of engaging in drug solicitation, whether as buyer or seller, could immediately be identified and reported to local authorities. While the process may raise concerns of rights to privacy and freedom of speech for users, enacting this method should discourage drug solicitation due to fear of being reported. Through this, all users, including minors, might be less likely to seek out drug solicitors, and parents may feel more secure knowing that this is the case. This method is not 100% efficient in stopping drug sales, as users may falsify identity documents or lie about their age, but it is a good first step. Also, while social media companies may face backlash for this implementation, the act in itself serves for the benefit of the majority, thus justifying my reasoning and making it ethically acceptable.

The analysis phase introduces and analyzes AT LEAST 3 options. Including 2 or fewer options is indicative of limited consideration for alternate viewpoints.

All obvious potential actions are analyzed as options. Even if you consider an option to be ethically prohibited, you give it full consideration.

Each option is classified as ethically prohibited, obligatory, or acceptable, with clear and logical justification.

Each option is weighed in relation to each stakeholder.

The second option I propose is giving parents more access to monitor their children's accounts. Minors would only be able to sign into their accounts if their parents were also at least

somewhat nearby for every session; parent proximity would be proven by the parents having to enter a password. This measure would allow children under 18 years of age to use social media while providing an extra layer of monitoring for parents. Through this option, parents are able to

monitor their child's activity on social media and ensure that it is not being used for drug solicitation. While minors may not appreciate their parents being able to monitor their activity, it may also discourage them from using social media to engage with drug solicitors, reducing the number of illegal purchases made online. At the same time, with parents able to monitor their children's accounts, if they do notice activities involving drug solicitation, they would have the ability to report accounts engaging in these activities and limit their child's account. This serves

as a benefit to parents as they feel more secure with their child's usage of social media, as well as a benefit to minors as we seek to protect them from fake drugs being sold online. Putting drug

solicitors at the utmost disadvantage is priority as we seek to address this issue, therefore this option serves to disadvantage them as well. Implementing this option into my decision will also show an active attempt by social media companies to address this issue, giving a little more credit to them for attempting to address drug solicitation occurring on their platforms. While one

might view this as a violation of an individual's **3 key aspects of privacy**, which guarantees "freedom from intrusion, control of information about oneself, and freedom from surveillance",

(Potasznik, Day 4), this would be ethically acceptable as only the parents would have the power to monitor and surveil their child's activity. Children may find a way around this measure, but again, it's up to the parents to teach their children to be honest (not stealing or saving passwords) as well as drug-free.

Each option is weighed in relation to each stakeholder.

Consequences of various ideas are fully noted. Consider each thought all the way to its logical conclusion and how it would affect various stakeholders.

Verbatim quotes require quotation marks in addition to citations.

Another option to consider would be the implementation of posts and advertisements warning about fentanyl-laced pills and the rise in deaths relating to it. In the article, Bebinger (2022) states that parents want “warnings about fentanyl-laced pills to pop up for all users, not just those searching for drugs,” and I agree. Teens are exposed to a lot of problematic content online, so a few informative posts about seemingly-innocent pills will at least provide a counter argument to drug dealer messaging. Educating users about the dangers of fentanyl-laced pills purchased online serves to reduce the number of deaths related to this issue. While we’re tweaking the algorithm to prioritize these warnings, we can also filter content related to drug use from minors timelines. By implementing warnings to pop up on content related to drug use, or the perpetuation of it, and filtering content related to drug use from people’s timelines, reducing the glorification of drug solicitation online serves to benefit all stakeholders involved besides drug solicitors. Educating users on the dangers of fentanyl-laced drugs and limiting their access to content related doesn’t violate any laws, since people do not have the right to access such information on our website. This option serves to benefit parents as they feel more confident in the content minors are exposed to; minors are more protected, educated, and reminded about the dangers of laced-drugs; social media companies look better in the public eye for taking action and reducing drug content on their platforms; and drug solicitors are less engaged and successful as their content is limited and filtered on the site. While this may be seen as a violation of **freedom of speech**, as “citizens may say almost anything they choose to without being punished by the government,” limiting their audience outreach is not a violation of such as we may decide what content is acceptable or not on our platform (Potaszniak, Day 6). This method does not involve the government punishing anyone, so no constitutional rights are violated. Therefore,

this option may be seen as ethically obligatory as we seek to reduce the glorification of drug use on our platforms and reduce the outreach of users posting content perpetuating drug use.

Finally, the last option I propose is prohibiting users under the age of 18 from having a social media account altogether. By doing this, we remove the ability for minors to access drug solicitors on social media entirely. However, this may have consequences similar to those of the FOSTA-SESTA Acts which, despite their valid goals of reducing sex trafficking, were criticized because sex workers had to resign themselves to “former dependent and dangerous situations,” such as street solicitation to survive when congress outlawed their ability to conduct business online (Potasznik, Day 6). Similarly, the prohibition of users under 18 from having social media accounts may only encourage them to find other, more dangerous, means of obtaining solicited drugs. Also, by prohibiting minors from having social media accounts, this may only make it more difficult to monitor a minor’s activity, making it more difficult to obtain a trail between them and drug dealers. However, without ID-verification, minors would still be able to make accounts and do so without surveillance from their parents. Prohibiting users under the age of 18 serves to benefit parents as they feel safer knowing their child is unable to access drug deals via social media, however they will have to monitor their children’s activities in other ways. Minors may be heavily against this option as it will remove their right to social media, and access to open communication these platforms, serving as a potential violation of their negative rights to information, however reducing their access to these platforms serves to protect them from drug solicitation, which can ultimately save their lives. Drug dealers who target younger customers will lose access to these people as we remove minors from social media, thus hopefully leading to a decrease in deaths related to fentanyl-laced pills. While social media companies may face

Some things we discuss in class may be relevant to your paper even if they are not class terms. Unless you came up with a law’s definition yourself (meaning you are a legislator in the US government), cite your source.

backlash from the public for this somewhat heavy-handed approach, enacting ways to proactively address this issue makes it ethically acceptable.

Synthesis

With these options presented, as a programmer for a social media company, I'm ready to propose a course of action to be taken. The best option that serves to benefit the greatest number of people in this issue would be a combination of particular aspects from the options presented. First, requiring ID verification for all users before using social media platforms serves to discourage drug dealers from engaging in illegal activities on social media platforms for fear of being caught. However, by requiring all users to verify their IDs, this in effect will reduce the number of minors utilizing social media platforms unmonitored. By requiring minors to sign up with a parents' permission, implementing a parent password that gives parents more control of their child's account, parents can feel more confident knowing that they can ensure that their children are not using social media to engage in activities such as drug solicitation. Finally, implementing more advertisements and warnings pertaining to the dangers of fentanyl-laced drugs into users' algorithms, and filtering content related to the perpetuation of drug use, serves to benefit all users by educating children, while reducing the outreach drug dealers have to audiences on social media.

This seems as the best course of action as social media platforms seek to address and tackle this issue without having to infringe upon people's natural rights to access their platforms. While keeping social media companies in good relation with the public eye, giving parents more confidence in their ability to monitor their children's activities and ensure their safety, educating and protecting minors to discourage them from engaging in solicited drug sales online, and discouraging drug solicitors from successfully dealing online while reducing their public

The synthesis phase takes all brainstorming and analysis information into consideration. From there you propose a course of action with logical justification.

outreach, this option is the most ethically obligatory as it maximizes all potential benefits for shared stakeholders besides drug dealers.

While some may view this option as an infringement of one's privacy, especially minors in America, that argument holds little strength for me. Children fundamentally have fewer rights than adults. Parents are allowed to control what children say and punish them if they disobey even arbitrary commands. Parents can also search their children's rooms without a warrant. Parents need this control so they can ensure the safety of their kids. Implementing measures to address the rising deaths in America due to fentanyl-laced pills requires everyone to work together. By doing using my suggestion, social media platforms do their part by restricting drug content on their platforms, while parents have the ability to ensure their children are participating in safe practices online. Students may not enjoy this experience, waiting to turn 18 to remove parental controls and access, but this serves to benefit them as we educate them on and reduce their access to the dangers of drug solicitation. Also, all measures included serve to put drug dealers at the upmost disadvantage as we seek to remove them from our platforms. Through a utilitarian analysis, this decision serves to bring about the greatest good for the greatest number of people, aiming to reduce the solicitation of drugs online and deaths related to such activities.

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