There is a moral panic around social media that has been happening for a few years now. Those who ascribe to this panic justify it in multiple ways whether that is citing the alarming amount of fake news on social media sites or pointing a finger at the hate speech and bullying that is present. No matter which way the issue is spun, the solution that people who buy into the moral panic are calling for is tighter and more restrictive regulation by the government and individual sites. The moral panic around social media has resulted from different issues that have come about from Facebook and Twitter collecting user data for targeted advertising, to the 2016 election tampering through the use of Facebook. While the concerns are understandable, the panic around social media is overblown and asking for more government regulation is an overreaction that could have more unwanted consequences.

Knowing where information comes from and who is sharing it is paramount in evaluating it, and social media sites show this more accurately than possibly anywhere else in the world. According to recent research, over 4.5 billion people use social media, translating to about 58% of the world's population being on social media (Chaffey). This is a staggering number of people sharing information on which they are not experts and not an esteemed authoritative figure in the field. The problem with this is that the other people who are taking in this information in various forms on social media platforms are not aware of this fact and thus might treat untrustworthy sources as reputable. However, this is hardly a case for more government intervention, as it should be on users to be more informed about their information and where they are getting it from. Many social media platforms are based in the United States, with eight of the top fifteen most used, and four of the top five all based in America (Zoica). Typically, corporations based in America subscribe to the idea of freedom of speech, and therefore are hesitant to enact more restrictive content policies for fear of suppressing that right. Users from around the world are free to share what they please with whom they please so long as it does not violate the loose terms of service of social media platforms, which tend to prohibit obvious immoralities such as child pornography and hate speech. In the case of social media, authority truly is constructed and contextual, and users have to arm themselves with ways of verifying information sources to be credible, and not taking anything at face value. Because so many people are spreading information, one has to look for reputable sources, which will differ based on the information desired. ESPN would be a good source to look for the latest free agency developments for the NFL offseason, while someone researching about crime in London might look at the website for *The Sun.* So, yes, misinformation can be dangerous, it is not grounds for the moral panic being so overblown as it is, and government regulations will do precious little to combat such a large issue; it is incumbent on each individual to fact-check their sources and find reputable news.

Information has value, and a tremendous amount. In fact, the value of information is what drives the latest innovations in technology and triggers new discourse. Information is used to educate and to inform others, and social media does a good job of that side of things. However, information can also be used in information warfare to influence things like the 2016 election. Many critics of this happening will lean towards the far extreme of reactions by asking for more government intervention to preserve democracy. "The view of social media as information warfare seems to go hand-in-hand with the contradictory idea that imposing more

regulation by the nation-state will "disarm" information and parry this threat to democracy," says Milton Mueller with the CATO Institute, in his discussion titled "Challenging the Social Media Moral Panic" (Mueller). Mueller asserts his belief throughout his discussion that further regulations will not fix the issue, and rather will only serve as a band-aid over the real issues, which are more complex and will require more time to uncover than many realize. Information falls under this category of "more complex" and more regulation will not stop information warfare, but best-case scenario, it would only force those who engage in information warfare to find new avenues to carry out their vision. Information's value is also based on the global trends of the time. People are more likely to pay attention to information that is relevant, and those who abuse information know this and will not be dissuaded by regulatory action, but in fact will only advance the front of information warfare to become even more undetectable than it already is. So, while the moral panic surrounding social media and its propensity to spread information, true or untrue, at breakneck speeds is somewhat understandable, it has been blown out of proportion and the calls for more regulation are not able to be justified on current standing.

Later on in his discussion of the social media moral panic, Mueller conveys that moral panics, in general, are dangerous because of the policy implications they may have, where the fear of those potentially affected by something like social media leads them to acquiesce in giving up elements of their freedom (Mueller). With the power of information and the relative lack of authority of those who spread this information, it is easy to see how a moral panic could ensue from social media having such a degree of freedom. It is good that people recognize that there is a degree of misinformation and disinformation present on social media platforms. But the part that is being misconstrued is where the initiative lies; it is the user's duty to ensure that a source is reputable and that information has been fact-checked before believing what they read. Government regulations or more restrictive rules enforced by the social media platforms themselves would go against what social media is for, which is the free flow of information. Dialogue between individuals is a key part of why social media is so popular, and silencing those people who are uninformed will only hurt everybody in the long run.

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