**Ethical Dimensions of Information Warfare**

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In “What Facebook Did to American Democracy” Alexis Madrigal emphasizes the significant role Facebook played in the distribution of political information during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. He points out that Facebook's substantial influence on political discourse was accompanied by challenges such as partisanship, misinformation propagation, and foreign interference, specifically from Russian operatives. Madrigal criticizes the lack of a cohesive narrative that connects these issues, which suggests a deeper examination into how Facebook's platform may have been exploited. He mentions a study suggesting Facebook's "I Voted" button possibly increased voter turnout which shows the platform's direct impact on electoral participation.

In this Case Analysis, I will argue that from a Confucian perspective, Facebook did not engage in information warfare intentionally, but its platform was used as a tool for such activities due to its influential capacity and open nature. Further, Facebook was partly responsible for the election outcome because its structure and policies did not adequately address the ethical and moral implications of its role in information dissemination and social governance.

***Prier's Perspective***

Lt Col Jarred Prier's analysis in "Commanding the Trend: Social Media as Information Warfare" talks about how social media platforms, like Facebook, can become arenas for state and non-state actors to have huge influence and control over public opinion and political outcomes. A central concept from Prier's analysis is the idea of "commanding the trend," where actors use social media algorithms and networks to amplify specific narratives or misinformation, effectively manipulating public discourse. This strategy involves leveraging both human driven content generation and bots to create and share messages.

In the context of the 2016 U.S. Presidential election Facebook's architecture and algorithms facilitated an environment where commanding the trend could thrive. The platform's design prioritizes engagement to drive ad revenue which optimizes the spread of content. This made it easy for the strategic spread of misinformation and propaganda as mentioned by Russian interference efforts aimed at sowing division and influencing the election's outcome.

Applying the ethical framework of Confucianism, which emphasizes the importance of proper roles and relationships in maintaining social harmony and moral conduct. Facebook's role can be critically assessed. In Confucian terms, Facebook as a social mediator and information distributor has a duty to ensure that its platform is not used to harm societal harmony. The right relationships, in this case, would involve Facebook taking greater responsibility for the content shared on its platform, actively working to prevent the misuse of its systems for spreading misinformation and causing division.

Prior to the recognition of the platform's misuse, Facebook could have implemented better algorithms and human moderation to detect and mitigate the spread of false information and divisive content. The Confucian value of rectification of names supports this and advocates for things to be made to accord with the proper definitions of their roles. For Facebook, this would mean realigning its role from merely a platform for engagement to a responsible curator of public discourse.

Also, Confucianism holds that moral education is important for maintaining social order and harmony. Facebook could have invested more in educating its users about the nature of the information they see which improves critical thinking and digital literacy. This aligns with the Confucian duty to cultivate virtue and knowledge which empowers users to evaluate the information they encounter.

In the spirit of maintaining societal harmony and order, Facebook should have collaborated more closely with electoral and cybersecurity people when the threats became apparent. This would be an embodiment of the Confucian principle of harmonious social cooperation between different parts of society each of them fulfilling its role for the greater good.

Furthermore, beyond immediate reactions Facebook needed to commit to long term changes in how it manages information flow and engagement. This involves creating algorithms that prioritize sensational content and creating a more balanced and ethically aware platform. This approach would align with the Confucian ideal of continuous self-improvement and adaptation to maintain ethical standards in changing circumstances.

In summary, while Facebook did not engage in information warfare intentionally, its platform played a significant role in the dissemination of harmful misinformation. As per Confucian ethics Facebook had a moral duty to act more responsibly showing the maintenance of proper roles and relationships to make sure the platform contributes positively to the social and political area.

***Scott's Perspective***

The central concepts that Scott talked about in his analysis involve the governance and ethical dimensions of cyberspace particularly focusing on the implications of widespread connectivity and the necessity of regulatory measures in our networked world. Scott introduces the idea of cybernetics originally as a term for governance which shows the need for a structured approach to managing the complexities introduced by global digital connectivity. This concept stresses that with the enhanced ability to communicate and influence across borders comes a responsibility to manage these capabilities wisely and ethically.

In analyzing Facebook's role in the 2016 U.S. election, Scott's insights into governance are very relevant. The platform's ability to connect millions, and the misuse of this connectivity for information warfare shows a breakdown in the proper governance of a powerful digital tool. Facebook's algorithmic promotion of content that maximizes engagement often amplified misleading or harmful information which significantly influenced public discourse. This issue shows the ethical challenges in cyberspace governance which is balancing freedom of expression with protections against the manipulation of public opinion.

Applying Confucian ethical principles, the idea of "proper roles" is important in assessing Facebook's actions. In Confucianism, each member of society is expected to understand and fulfill their roles responsibly. For Facebook this implies a duty to act not just as a business maximizing profit, but as a steward of public discourse, ensuring that its platform does not become a tool for societal harm. This role requires a vigilant approach to content management and a proactive stance against the misuse of the platform.

Scott’s examination of cybernetics as governance implies that platforms like Facebook should have structured measures in place to manage the flow of information and prevent the spread of misinformation. Given the platform's influence Facebook should have implemented stronger oversights to detect and mitigate the spread of false info, especially those emanating from state-sponsored actors aiming to disrupt democratic processes.

From a Confucian perspective, Facebook's leadership should uphold ethical responsibilities that are beyond corporate profit to include the well being of the community it serves. This means developing and enforcing guidelines that stay away from deceptive practices and creating a more informative and less divisive online discourse.

Confucian ethics also emphasizes the importance of education in fostering moral behavior. Facebook could have been more proactive in educating its users about the nature of the content they consume online. By promoting digital literacy and critical thinking Facebook would be fulfilling its educational role and contributing to a more informed public.

Scott’s emphasis on the necessity for governance in the digital world shows that Facebook had a duty to better regulate its platform. By applying Confucian principles, it becomes evident that Facebook should have taken a more active role in ensuring its platform was used ethically and promoting harmony and proper conduct in line with its significant influence on society. The right actions would involve stricter content policies, increased transparency about the platform's operations, and an effort to educate its users about the impact of their online engagement. These measures would align Facebook more closely with the ethical governance needed to maintain social harmony and the integrity of public discourse.

***Conclusion***

In conclusion, this analysis argues that Facebook did not fulfill its governance responsibilities which under Confucian principles would include ensuring harmony and proper conduct within its digital community. It engaged in information warfare by allowing its platform to be manipulated by external actors during the 2016 U.S. election. Moreover, Facebook has partial responsibility for the election's outcome due to its significant influence over public discourse and failure to mitigate the spread of misinformation.

People could say that regulating content on platforms like Facebook challenges free speech principles and could lead to over censorship. While that point may be valid this concern must be balanced against the harm caused by unchecked misinformation. The platform's role in shaping public opinion calls for a proactive approach to governance that does not necessarily compromise free speech but makes sure the reliability of information being disseminated.

The case of Facebook shows broader implications for all social media platforms, stressing the need for better mechanisms to safeguard digital ecosystems against information warfare.

**References**

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