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End of Course Reflection

One topic that I have engaged with within this course is whistleblowing discussed in Module 5. With this topic, we looked at a case study on Edward Snowden in which I determined that he did the right thing when it came to exposing top secret NSA documents to the public. His goal was to expose the U.S. government for their actions and make them known to the world. Snowden did not have malicious intentions when leaking this information because he could have easily given these sensitive documents to another country for them to use against the U.S. Instead, it is clear that his sole motive was to give Americans the option to be able to read what the NSA is doing. For instance, he states “my sole motive is to inform the public as to that which is done in their name and that which is done against them” (The Guardian).

Overall, Snowden had good intentions and put the American people above his own life which he felt the government was not willing to do. Even with the documents, he chose ones that would be of value to Americans and not ones that would harm certain people. This whistleblowing unit shows that we should not be in the dark when it comes to our own government. Even though there were certain people that he could have exposed, Snowden chose not to, which makes him a good person. Whistleblowing is the only way to get people’s attention on important issues in the right way. It makes us question how our government operates.

The second topic that I have engaged with in this course is information warfare discussed in Module 7. Specifically, involving Facebook and their connection with the 2016 election. This

election caused us as Americans to not have trust in the media because of how influential it is. Facebook has had a big influence when it comes to politics and elections in general. For instance, in 2012, the “I Voted” button was a big success among young people. As a result, the democratic party definitely got a lead since the majority of young people voted democrat. However, 2016 caused a major shift in how a person was elected because of how user’s data was collected without their knowledge in order to persuade them to vote for Trump.

Cambridge Analytica was also involved in this scandal as they were a political firm under the Trump campaign. They used the data of the users on Facebook to determine what ads to target towards them that would make them want to vote for Trump. When signing up for social media platforms, such as Facebook, we take a gamble in the risk of having our data being used and collected without our knowledge. At the end of the day, Facebook may play the victim and say that they had no idea what was going on, but they are still guilty because they knew exactly what they were doing. The problem is, Facebook has not been held accountable for their part in the 2016 election outcome along with many other issues that they have faced in the past because people are constantly using the platform. If people started to draw away from this platform, then maybe Facebook would see that they have only caused more harm than good.

The third topic that I have engaged with within this course is professional ethics discussed in Module 4. In this module, we watched a 20 minute TED talk in which Tufekki uses the example of candy at the checkout line that is eye level making it hard for parents to resist buying it for their children. This was used to show a physical example of persuasion architecture to help us understand how ads work in the digital world. There are many companies who use algorithms to make someone want to buy a certain product. Facebook, Amazon, and Google are just a few examples of those companies that are known for doing it. These companies are able to

get you to click on ads based on your likes, interests, political views, etc. With all that being said, the principle that I would include in my own code of ethics is integrity. Integrity seems to be lacking nowadays in the digital world, especially when it comes to ads.

Many ads are often deceiving and oftentimes the product does not look like what it is advertised in person. However, by doing so, companies are retrieving our data and using it for other purposes that we know nothing about. Having integrity would prevent companies from creating ads that track our data for their own financial gain since that is morally wrong. From an ethical standpoint, Kant's view of deontology fits well here because he would view these companies' actions as morally wrong because he believes in respecting others. Deontology is about doing the right thing always even when we may not always like to. This module has taught me how important it is for companies to communicate with their customers exactly what they are collecting from them as well as how they are going to use it.