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Soc 250
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Presentation Reflection Paper

My group's research and presentation yielded a lot of great topics of discussion in which the class was very engaged as well as intrigued during our leadership of the class's lesson plan. Jessica started our presentation off with some background about Internet privacy, including the history behind it, which was very interesting because the class wasn't alive for its origins. She continued by stating some recent privacy issues that are relevant in shaping the current narrative surrounding Internet privacy. Next, she talked about how and why companies use and track your information through the use of cookies, echo chambers, and through the rise of hackers. Lastly, she talked about digital consumerism and certain new technologies and securities, which transitioned nicely into my area of research – cloud computing and online privacy concerns related to cloud usage. I defined what “the cloud” means - since in my research I found that many people don't actually have a very clear idea of what the cloud even is. After defining the cloud and some related terminology, I spoke about both the potential benefits and concerns of using cloud technologies, which was very important in sparking discussion ideas because the class was able to differentiate between the good and the bad associated with cloud computing. I focused more on the concerns though, because that coincided well with Jessica's discussions of privacy and tracking. I also provided information about the online consumer culture present in our world – again with a clear interpretation of the positives and negatives that are present. Lastly, I spoke about the idea of “trust” online that exists, and how privacy policies aren't as they truly

appear. Finally, Gerry was able to provide concrete examples of how our societies are being lead and directed towards online consumerism and how we are transitioning to the cloud by talking about the prevalence of the generation of cord cutters, and the use of streaming services. This is known as the “digitization” of society, which was a crucial aspect of his research and presentation. All in all, we covered a fairly wide range of topics, but I felt that there were a few key concepts in our discussions and engagement with the class that warrant further exploration in this paper, as well as over the duration of the rest of the semester. These key concepts will thus appear on our final product.

The notion of our online privacy was one that was discussed at great length over both days with the class. Jessica’s introduction about the origins and history of Internet privacy provided a great background into the issues that we are currently being faced with today – which all three of us spoke about in our individual subject presentations. An important distinction was made between “privacy” and “publicity.” She cited a definition from Business dictionary that states, “privacy is the right to be free from secret surveillance and to determine whether, when, how, and to whom, one’s personal or organizational information is to be revealed.” In contrast, Oxford dictionary states publicity is: “the giving out of information about a product, person, or company for advertising or promotional purposes.” The juxtaposition of these two terms is important because in reality, privacy online is more related to the term publicity. I also spoke on behalf of this dichotomy, by deconstructing the commonly used term “privacy policy.” I found in my research that most Americans think privacy policy refers to “the ways in which our

information will be kept private,” but in actuality, it refers to “how companies DO use your private information. Thus, the terminology is highly misleading. In association with privacy policy is the concept of terms and conditions, and how as consumers we blindly agree to the terms and conditions issued by companies without reading them. We spoke as a large group about how it’s amoral of companies to present us with terms and conditions that are intentionally lengthy, misleading, and difficult to decipher, and how many of us feel that the nature of companies doing so is highly exploitative. I think this is a great topic to discuss at further length during the rest of the semester, as we undoubtedly will continue to be faced with privacy policies down the road. An idealistic goal would be that legislation could be passed to make privacy policies and terms and conditions more accessible and easier to understand for the average consumer. However, I don’t feel that this will happen and I believe that we will continue to be methodically duped as online consumers.

Another key concept that came out of our presentation was the notion of the digitization of our society, and how it is transformative in nature. Gerry spoke explicitly about the digitization, whereas in Jessica’s portion as well as mine, digitization was implied, but nonetheless apparent. Gerry defined digitization as taking tangible objects or materials, as well as intangibles, and converting them to digital copies or artifacts. There are examples of the process of digitization everywhere, including online shopping replacing the physical stores, forms of entertainment such as movies or music being streamed online instead of in DVD or CD form, and social interactions taking place more and more online rather than face

to face. Digitization is thus becoming a norm rather than a new phenomenon. In our age of technological advancement, using technologies is a critical aspect of our daily lives, so through acts such as cord cutting, (in which people are opting for services that don't require cables: cable television, landline phones etc.), and the use of streaming services. My discussion of how companies are switching to cloud based storage in place of physical locations that house servers and hard-wired technologies was important in the digitization process as well. Many companies are switching to cloud based storage for the various benefits that it possesses, so it is important to note the process of digitization for businesses and consumers alike. It's safe to thus assume that digitization will continue to expand in the future, which warrants discussion in this particular class. It's difficult to say and project exactly what, how, and when certain things present in society will become digitized, but this notion sparked definite conversation amongst the class and is thus important for our final product. Furthermore, digitization is a key topic to discuss in the future because it is directly intertwined with the privacy issues I previously referenced.

Lastly, a crucial concept that I feel emerged from our project was the prevalence of an online consumer culture that exists. Both Jessica and I spoke at length about how we as individuals are seen by companies online as points of emphasis for data collection in order to market information and products towards us. In order to track our information, as Jessica pointed out, we agree to terms and conditions that put your personal data in their hands. There are several different ways in which they do so, which we showed to the class in the activity in which people were able to see certain methods used by companies. However, as we

pointed out, these are just *some* of the strategies that companies use – we do not know the full extend to which they are tracking and using our data because we can't decipher the lengthy terms and conditions or privacy policies we are confronted with. It's important to note that this has the effect of personalizing your online experience. By doing so, it appears that we are being benefitted. Websites are designed and oriented in ways that facilitate ease of use and access, we receive targeted advertising based on our searches and interests, and cookies store information about us that create a profile to enhance online interactions. I echoed these ideas presented by Jessica by talking about the article I gave to the class as reading material. In the article, a cyber security expert made the claim that surveillance is the business model of the Internet. Everyone is under constant surveillance by many companies, ranging from social networking sites to cellphone providers. The data is collected, compiled, analyzed, and used to try to sell us things. This is problematic because we, as online consumers, essentially have to accept the fact that we are unable to fully control the ways in which companies have access to, and use our online information. Furthermore, Gerry noted that certain services we subscribe to (pay money for) such as Netflix, Hulu, Spotify, etc. all are concrete examples of companies that use our information to personalize experiences and try to sell us more stuff. As is with the previous concept of digitization, I feel that it's safe to consume the practices of online consumerism will undoubtedly continue to expand in the future. Doing things online is the norm in our society now; everything is concentrated, displayed, and facilitated through various online mediums, so as technology advances, this practice will continue. In terms of our discussions as

young, budding sociologists, it is very important to examine and talk about the societal implications of this type of online, digital culture influences our lives. The vast, expansive nature of varying online mediums will only continue to grow, and thus will change our day-to-day lives as participants in these online markets.

In this process of reflection, it was a bit difficult to pull out and describe at length just a few key concepts that we spoke about in our group presentation. I think that the placement of myself, Jessica, and Gerry into a group was definitely a great way to combine our ideas and to spark discussion with the class. With that being said, (and my guess is that this was intentional on your part!) a lot of our ideas definitely overlapped and the three of us came across a lot of the same things in our research. I pulled out three key concepts of online privacy, digitization of society, and online consumer culture as terms we can and should focus on during the rest of the semester, but I feel it's important to note that these terms serve a function similar to that of an umbrella. Underneath the umbrella of these three ideas includes several different sub-topics that are also worth exploring. I expect that we will thus likely encounter the sub-topics again as we focus on the three key concepts down the road. All in all, I very much enjoyed working with Jessica and Gerry on this project and I am glad we will continue to focus on these ideas as the semester comes to a close! I look forward to engaging in discussions and conversations about how online privacy, digitization, and online consumer culture are relevant in our lives today, as well as how these three concepts can be examined from a sociological perspective.