



جامعة الأمير محمد بن فهد الأهلية
PRINCE MOHAMMAD BIN FAHD UNIVERSITY

UNIV1212: Critical thinking and problem-solving

Compare and Contrast Two Argument Essays

Should Social Media Platforms Be Regulated by Governments

Problem Solving

Introduction

Social media has rapidly evolved into a dominant force shaping communication, culture, and political engagement worldwide. With platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (X), and TikTok influencing billions of people, the question of whether these platforms should be regulated by governments has sparked intense academic and policy debates. Supporters of regulation argue that unchecked digital platforms facilitate misinformation, hate speech, and data misuse, which can have real-world consequences. Conversely, critics contend that regulation risks censorship and suppression of free expression. This report compares two academic essays with opposing views: Napoli (2019) argues against government regulation, warning of the dangers to democratic freedoms and innovation, while Gorwa (2019) advocates for thoughtful governance frameworks to enhance accountability and public safety. The report will analyze each side's reasoning, identify logical fallacies or assumptions, compare the arguments, and conclude with an evaluation of which position offers stronger justification based on critical thinking principles.

Arguments Against

One of the strongest cases against government regulation of social media platforms is centered on the potential threat it poses to freedom of expression, which is a fundamental democratic right. According to Napoli (2019), government attempts to regulate content can create a dangerous precedent, where control over online discourse shifts from users and civil society to political institutions with their own agendas. He warns that such regulatory powers can be misused by governments to suppress dissent, control narratives, or discriminate against minority voices, particularly in countries with fragile democratic systems. This argument draws upon historical analogies, referencing how state-controlled media environments in authoritarian regimes have often led to oppression and the erosion of civil liberties. It assumes that once governments intervene in regulating online platforms, they may continue to expand their control under the pretext of national security or public order—thus creating a slippery slope. Although Napoli acknowledges the concerns about online misinformation and harmful content, he argues that empowering governments with content regulation could cause more harm than good by weakening the independence and neutrality of the digital public sphere. Another key argument Napoli presents

is that regulation may stifle innovation and technological progress. He explains that the success of social media platforms has been driven by their ability to evolve rapidly in response to user behavior, technological advances, and market competition. Introducing rigid regulations, especially those that require platforms to comply with detailed content moderation rules or transparency standards, could impose high costs and bureaucratic constraints on companies. This could particularly affect startups and smaller platforms that lack the resources of tech giants like Meta or Google, ultimately reducing diversity in the digital space. The argument appeals to economic authority, referencing market dynamics and investor behavior that respond negatively to regulatory uncertainty. However, this line of reasoning contains an assumption that the industry can effectively self-regulate, despite evidence to the contrary—such as the 2018 Cambridge Analytica scandal, which revealed how platforms allowed massive misuse of user data for political manipulation (Isaak & Hanna, 2018). While Napoli's concerns are not without merit, they may exaggerate the negative outcomes of regulation and underplay the necessity of oversight in preventing harm and ensuring ethical standards in digital environments.

Arguments For

Advocates for regulating social media platforms present compelling arguments grounded in the need to protect individuals and democratic institutions from the harmful consequences of unmoderated online content. One of the primary arguments, as presented by Gorwa (2019), is that social media platforms have repeatedly failed to self-regulate, leading to the unchecked spread of misinformation, hate speech, and dangerous content that can incite real-world violence. Gorwa points to examples such as the role of Facebook in Myanmar's ethnic cleansing crisis, where hate-filled posts against the Rohingya minority were allowed to spread without adequate moderation, contributing to human rights abuses. He argues that platforms driven by profit motives have little incentive to act unless external regulatory pressure forces them to prioritize user safety and accountability. This argument relies heavily on reasoning by example, using documented incidents to illustrate the real-world consequences of platform inaction. Furthermore, it assumes that voluntary self-regulation is inherently flawed due to the conflicting interests between corporate profits and public well-being—a claim supported by empirical studies showing that engagement-driven algorithms often amplify polarizing or false content to retain users' attention

(Vaidhyathan, 2018). A second argument for regulation involves the call for transparent and consistent governance mechanisms to ensure fair treatment of users and equitable enforcement of platform rules. Klonick (2018) argues that major social media companies act as *de facto* governments by creating and enforcing their own rules for billions of users globally, yet they operate without democratic accountability. These corporations moderate speech, ban users, and promote certain content over others without public oversight. Klonick refers to these practices as the work of “the new governors” of online speech and calls for legal frameworks that require platforms to disclose their moderation policies, provide appeal mechanisms, and cooperate with independent regulatory bodies. This line of reasoning is supported by authority-based argumentation, drawing on legal scholarship and democratic theory to justify the need for public regulation of quasi-public digital spaces. A potential assumption in this argument is that regulation will be applied fairly and without political interference—an ideal that may not always hold, especially in authoritarian contexts. However, Gorwa (2019) and Klonick (2018) propose co-regulatory models, where governments collaborate with civil society, academic experts, and industry representatives to design balanced oversight mechanisms. These hybrid approaches are exemplified by the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Digital Services Act, which enforce transparency and accountability while preserving freedom of expression (European Commission, 2022). In conclusion, the pro-regulation argument acknowledges the complexity of governance but presents a well-supported case for thoughtful oversight.

Comparison and Contrast

While both essays by Napoli (2019) and Gorwa (2019) tackle the same issue—whether governments should regulate social media—they represent fundamentally different worldviews, argument styles, and assumptions about the role of digital platforms in society. Napoli’s arguments are built primarily on analogy and authority, using historical parallels and economic reasoning to emphasize the dangers of regulation, while Gorwa’s arguments rely heavily on empirical evidence and examples, highlighting specific failures in content moderation and the harms caused by self-regulation. Both essays identify a major problem: social media platforms are powerful entities with significant influence over speech, public discourse, and democratic processes. However, they

diverge on the solution. Napoli sees regulation as a slippery slope toward authoritarianism, assuming that any interference by the state will inevitably lead to censorship and suppression. In contrast, Gorwa argues that absence of regulation is equally dangerous, allowing profit-driven algorithms and inconsistent platform policies to dictate public communication with no accountability. From a critical thinking perspective, Napoli's reliance on the slippery slope fallacy is a notable weakness. He presumes that any regulatory attempt will escalate into full censorship, without sufficiently addressing examples of successful regulatory frameworks such as the EU's Digital Services Act. Gorwa, by comparison, acknowledges this risk but counters it by proposing co-regulation models, which include oversight from independent institutions, not just government bodies. This shows a more nuanced understanding of governance mechanisms and avoids absolutist thinking. Moreover, Napoli assumes that markets and user behavior can correct platform issues, but this assumption has been debunked by events like the Cambridge Analytica scandal, where market dynamics did not protect users from harm (Isaak & Hanna, 2018). Gorwa challenges this assumption directly by citing failures in platform responsibility even after major public scrutiny. In terms of structure, Napoli's argument is defensive, warning against possible negative outcomes, while Gorwa's is constructive, offering actionable frameworks and policy suggestions. Both essays are persuasive in different ways: Napoli appeals to libertarian principles and fears of state power, while Gorwa emphasizes collective responsibility, transparency, and ethical oversight. Their differences reflect a broader ideological divide between those who trust decentralized digital ecosystems and those who believe regulation is essential for justice and safety. However, both essays share an implicit recognition that the status quo is insufficient—whether due to overreach or inaction, something must change in how we govern digital speech. This shared foundation allows for constructive debate but highlights the deeper tension between liberty and responsibility, which lies at the heart of modern digital governance discourse.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the debate over regulating social media platforms highlights a fundamental tension between protecting democratic freedoms and ensuring public safety in the digital age. Napoli (2019) makes a strong case for caution, arguing that government regulation may endanger freedom of expression and innovation. His concerns about the misuse of regulatory power and the

risk of censorship are valid, especially in politically unstable environments. However, his reliance on slippery slope reasoning and assumptions of market self-correction weaken the overall strength of his argument. On the other hand, Gorwa (2019) presents a more robust and forward-thinking perspective, grounded in documented failures of self-regulation and evidence-based recommendations for co-regulation. By incorporating real-world examples, proposing alternative models, and addressing counterarguments, Gorwa constructs a more balanced and actionable approach to platform governance. From a critical thinking standpoint, his argument is more complete and realistic, as it considers both the risks and the necessity of intervention. Therefore, this report concludes that Gorwa's position is stronger and more convincing, not because it denies the risks of regulation, but because it thoughtfully balances them against the equally serious risks of doing nothing. Effective social media regulation, when implemented transparently and collaboratively, offers the best path forward in managing the growing influence of digital platforms while preserving core democratic values.

References

1. European Commission. (2022). *The Digital Services Act explained*. Retrieved from <https://ec.europa.eu>
2. Gorwa, R. (2019). The platform governance triangle: Conceptualizing the informal regulation of online content. *Internet Policy Review*, 8(2), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.14763/2019.2.1407>
3. Isaak, J., & Hanna, M. J. (2018). User data privacy: Facebook, Cambridge Analytica, and privacy protection. *Computer*, 51(8), 56–59. <https://doi.org/10.1109/MC.2018.3191268>
4. Klonick, K. (2018). The new governors: The people, rules, and processes governing online speech. *Harvard Law Review*, 131(6), 1598–1670. <https://harvardlawreview.org/2018/04/the-new-governors/>
5. Napoli, P. M. (2019). *Social media and the public interest: Media regulation in the disinformation age*. Columbia University Press.
6. Vaidhyathan, S. (2018). *Antisocial media: How Facebook disconnects us and undermines democracy*. Oxford University Press.