Big Tech: Regulation and Data Privacy

July 30, 2020

The Lepage Center's Strategic Advisers program connects Tulane students and recent graduates with New Orleans area entrepreneurs and small business owners who have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The advisers are working for the businesses full-time for 10 weeks during the summer of 2020, providing immediate services based on each business's specific needs.

The strategic advisers meet weekly via video conference to discuss what's going on at their companies and to learn from one another. **Last week we focused on data privacy and big tech.** For this conversation, **advisers were asked how they would regulate big tech if the decision were up to them.** Below are some of their thoughts:



"I would create a right to data privacy. Users of online tools would need to be informed that their data is being observed, and companies would be banned from using cookies and pixels to track activity outside of their app or website. Furthermore, sharing or selling of personally identifiable data would be highly regulated and monitored with still penalties for violations. Some data would also be entirely off limits for sharing or keeping without consent, such as government identification numbers, credit card numbers, sensitive passwords, and voter registrations."

"Our current laws on monopolies are painfully outdated and were written in reference to the oil monopolies in the 19th century. They serve to protect consumer rights, but that almost always centers on the price of goods, and well Facebook, and many other platforms are free."

"I think Mark Zuckerberg said it best, 'I think the real question as the internet becomes more important in people’s lives is what is the right regulation, not whether there should be [regulation] or not.'"

"We, as a collective society, have relied on companies and their services, such as, Amazon for delivering groceries, Google for constant COVID-19 updates, etc. In this time of great distress, our issues with big tech have faded to the background as the global pandemic has consumed the media spotlight and our reliance on them has increased exponentially."

"The first step that I would take if I were in charge of regulating Big Tech companies would be to regulate the social media giants as utilities. In today’s world, companies like Facebook and Twitter have become so large and intertwined into the daily lives of so many people that they are past the point of being able to regulate themselves."

"Alphabet also continues to be the elephant in the room for mega tech. Since the inception of their search algorithm Google Alphabet has continued to be the golden goose for advertising in a digital age. Google Search and YouTube are two of the most visited sites in the world."

"Understanding exactly how these companies are collecting data and using the data in a safe way that will positively affect users across the United States should be the objective. If I was a regulator, I would hire people from these big tech companies to help me come up with the right way for regulation."

"During the pandemic, big tech has been at the forefront of every temporary solution to allowing our world to continue to operate, from remote learning to remote working. We have become increasingly reliant on this tech for so much of our lifestyle. With this power though, comes the potential for great change, but also potentially detrimental impacts to our society in terms of the amount of information we have available and the ability for that information to manipulate the public and shape opinions."