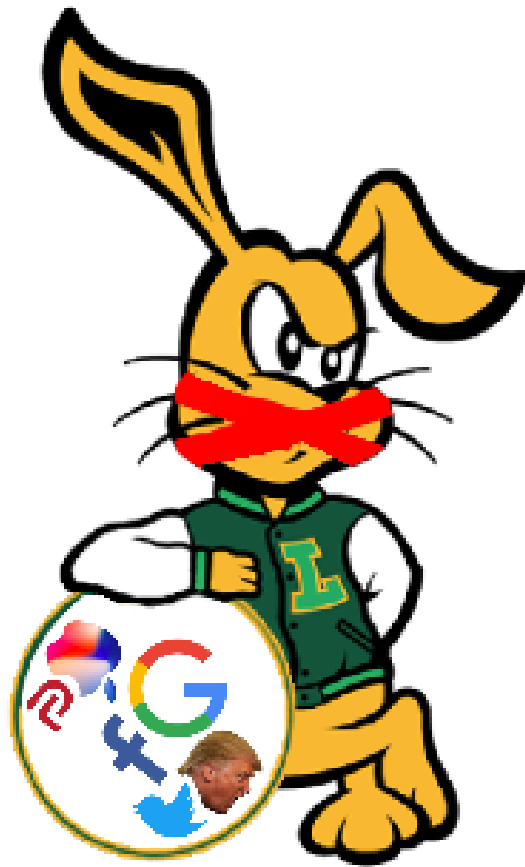## UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development:

BIG TECH CENSORSHIP

JACKRABBIT MUN III

L.B. POLY – MAY 22nd, 2021

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HEAD CHAIR LETTER

Dear Esteemed Delegates,

Welcome to Jackrabbit MUN III and the United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development (UNCSTD). My name is Hamid Torabzadeh, and I am a junior at LB Poly High School. I have been a member of Poly Model UN since my freshman year—particularly involved with conference committee topics focused on science, technology, and global health. I have attended conferences ranging from TritonMUN to VirginiaMUN! Outside of MUN, I am also Co-Captain of our school's robotics team, Poly Robotics, President of Poly Red Cross, and a member of the Speech & Debate team on campus.

I am extremely excited to be your Head Chair and to be working with all of you. The issue of big tech censorship could not be more prominent, widespread, and pivotal at an international level, with its own unique challenges across industries and stakeholders. Policy widely varies between countries, and the UNCSTD finds itself having to address challenges like never before in global history.

This modern issue could use some ideas from a new generation. With your insight and intellect, I am confident forward-looking and innovative ideas will be discussed. I look forward to seeing some high-level debate, robust arguments on policy and legislative interpretation, and creative solutions.

Sincerely,

Hamid Torabzadeh

UNCSTD Committee, Head Chair

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DAIS INTRODUCTIONS

VICE CHAIR: DANNY NGUYEN

Hi delegates! My name is Danny and I have the pleasure of being your Vice Chair. I'm a senior here at Poly and have been in Model UN for three years now. Outside of MUN, I am very dedicated to several other extracurriculars. I am a captain on the cross country team and math team here at Poly and I also frequently volunteer with the UNICEF club. Over the past few years, MUN has helped me explore my interests in both international and American politics and improve my public speaking skills. The topic of censorship is particularly interesting to me because I have been fascinated by politicians' increasing use of social media as a powerful weapon. I look forward to a robust debate between delegates as you all grapple with this pressing challenge.

RAPPORTEUR: KAAYA BATRA

Hello! I am Kaaya Batra and I will be the Rapporteur for our committee. I am in 11th grade and have been in MUN since freshman year. Aside from MUN, I also play basketball and sing in my school's jazz ensemble. I am involved with many clubs focused on social justice and environmental sustainability, but am especially grateful for the opportunities MUN has provided me to learn more about the challenges our world faces, as well as their potential solutions. I am very excited for this committee and look forward to a thoughtful and inspiring debate!

LEGAL: AUDREY LOTSPEICH

Hello everyone! My name is Audrey Lotspeich and I will be your legal for this committee. I am a senior at Poly and this is my second year doing MUN. I have had a lot of fun doing it, improved my public speaking, and learned a lot more about what is going on in the world. In addition, I have also been involved in theater at Poly. I am really excited for this committee because it is a debate about a very real reality as tech advances.

ABOUT THE COMMITTEE

The United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development (UNCSTD) the United Nations' home for discussions on science and technology – what is new, what matters, what is changing, what the impact is – and how this affects development and a sustainable future for all. It is the forum that helps ask and frame the critical issues influencing the fields of science and technology today.

Some of the important normative issues raised include the technology and life interface, as well as governance of the use and development of frontier technologies – namely, big data analytics, biotech and genome editing, the Internet of things (IoT), and artificial intelligence.

The UNCSTD is also an open platform where proposals, ideas, experiences, cases, and intellectual thought can be channeled toward making a policy impact. It facilitates concrete collaborations between member states, NGOs, and actors in the science, technology, and development space.

TOPIC SYNOPSIS

As technology companies ranging from social media platforms to cloud-based businesses continue to gain power over numerous aspects of society including the economy, education, and social communications, the issue of "Big Tech" censorship cannot be more central to all of our lives. Censorship plays a large role in free speech, political discourse, market power, internet safety, and international security.

The United Nations can have a significant impact on the role of Big Tech companies in censorship, in hopes of protecting freedom, ensuring safety, and advancing equity and opportunity for all. Complex relations between private industry, governments, and individuals are essential to the path forward as well. While select countries are home to key Big Tech, efforts to ensure the global tech sector is sustainable and just will depend upon the implementation of international cooperation and frameworks like never before.

POSITION PAPER GUIDELINES

JACKRABBITMUN POSITION PAPER GUIDELINES

- Position Papers are due at 11:59 PM on **Sunday, May 16th, 2021** in order to be eligible for **research AND committee awards**.
- Position Papers are due at 11:59 PM on **Friday, May 21st, 2021** in order to be eligible for **committee awards ONLY**.
- Position Papers can be submitted through the committee email:
    - Email to: bigtech.jackrabbit@gmail.com
- At the top of each paper, include your country name, first and last name, committee, and topic.

    United States of America
    First Last
    United Nations Commission for Science and Technology Development
    Big Tech Censorship

- Papers should be emailed as a PDF file.
    - Paper content should also be copied and pasted into the body of the email so it can still be graded in the event of any technical difficulties
    - Please name file and subject line of email [Committee_Country Name]
        - Ex. Big Tech Censorship_United States of America
- Papers should be 1-2 pages in length with any additional pages for citations.
- Papers should be single-spaced in Times New Roman 12 pt. font and include no pictures or graphics.
- Please include the following sections for each committee topic:
    - Background
    - Past Actions by the Committee
    - Position of your Country/Character
    - Possible Solutions

If you have any questions, please email your Chair (hamidtorabzadeh@outlook.com)

TOPIC: BIG TECH CENSORSHIP

BACKGROUND

Defining Big Tech:

Companies labeled as Big Tech include Apple, Facebook, Google, Amazon, and Microsoft. These six companies, known as Tech Giants, dominate the economic and social sectors of our society. Other large tech companies include Tencent, Sony, Netflix, and Adobe.

Economic Sector:

Before becoming mass corporations, many of these Big Tech companies were already generating adequate profits. For example, Apple is an active and well-known leader in producing cell phones, but they started as a computer company with a successful side business in MP3 players. Now, Apple has risen to the top as a $1 trillion mass corporation. These Big Tech companies have reached billions of consumers worldwide. Approximately 90% of Facebook users are people outside of the US/Canada, and Google makes up more than 90% of the market share[1] for the search engine market. This shows Facebook's and Google's motivation to increase their presence in a rapidly advancing technological world.

The five Tech Giants have "a market capitalization of $2.4 trillion" which is approximately equal to the GDP of France. According to Rana Foroohar, a global

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[1] A market share is the portion of a market that is controlled by a specific company.

business columnist at the Financial Times, the Big Tech companies "first achieved success through innovation", but their goals have since changed. The Big Tech companies have climbed to the top of the economy causing it to become unbalanced. In the American economy "10% of companies accumulate 80% of profit." Now, a lot of small innovators and companies are struggling to make profits, when the Big Tech companies are dominating the economy. Overall, Big Tech companies are known as "companies that price out competition, exploit consumers, rip off partners or collect vast amounts of user data".

Social Sector:

Big Tech companies have a widespread impact on people's daily lives. Every day, countless people fall victim to misinformation. This is caused by the Big Tech Company's main goal; to attract consumers to their apps daily. Whether it's scrolling through Facebook or Instagram, searching Google's plethora of content, or binge-watching a Netflix show, the Big Tech companies are ultimately providing people with content that grabs the attention of diverse individuals on their apps. The algorithms used to lure users into spending a substantial amount of time on these apps increase the number of people accessing content from the Big Tech companies and, as a result, expands profit.

Privacy, implications for free speech, fake news, and censorship are a few alarming topics surrounding Big Tech companies, which need to be addressed by the companies and government.

Defining Big Tech Censorship:

Censorship is the suppression or prohibition of speech, public communication or other information that is considered obscene, politically unacceptable, or a threat to security. Censorship can be conducted by governments, private institutions, and other

controlling bodies, and each has different guidelines for the types of censorship they can levy.

Big Tech companies, in particular social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, typically take action when a user violates their outlined rules and guidelines, for example, "Twitter Rules" and Facebook's "Community Standards." These guidelines share common themes across platforms such as safety (banning anything including violence, terrorism, abuse, etc.), privacy, and authenticity. Some specific examples include nudity, hate speech, imposter profiles, and spam. A number of other factors such as severity of the infraction, public interest, and user history are also taken into account when deciding enforcement action.

However, social media companies disclose that censorship may also be in response to "a valid and properly scoped request from an authorized entity in a given country" with no connection to the outlined rules at all. In particular, Facebook is known for censoring political and religious content that is "illegal under local law," which in actuality, is the equivalent to abiding by a request by a country's government. For example, in 2017, per government request, "Facebook began supporting Pakistan's crackdown on religiously offensive content by removing it from its platform." This ultimately encouraged dire consequences, with Taimoor Raza, found guilty of making "blasphemous comments" about prominent Muslim deities, becoming the first person to ever be sentenced to death for a Facebook post. In fact, this pattern of censoring posts that are religiously offensive or criticize governments are seen most prominently in Turkey, Pakistan, and especially India, with nearly 5,000 pieces of content censored there in the span of only six months. This is in stark contrast to the 4th most censored country, Germany, where Facebook only removed 34 "pieces of content" in that same time frame.

These companies can censor content through three main avenues: terms of service, content warnings, and removal. Terms of service encompasses mutual agreements where users recognize what types of content is not allowed and agree to be both exposed to that content and to not post it, and content warnings consist of companies labeling user's individual content as sensitive. Some platforms, such as Twitter, break this down even further into Tweet-level enforcement, direct message-level enforcement, and account-level enforcement. Each contains their own spectrum of severity, from a simple action such as requiring profile edits to something as drastic as tweet removal or permanent account suspension.

There is much controversy about the developmental process of such rules and censorship policies, as well as the steps towards taking enforcement action. Additionally, very few companies are known to actually disclose this information. Facebook is one of these few, demonstrating near full-transparency with their processes. They claim their Community Standards are developed by a content policy team, with experts in a variety of fields such as technology, human rights, terrorism, and child safety. This team, in addition to the advice of these experts, considers the input and feedback of the Facebook community itself to ensure their policies are inclusive of a variety of perspectives and beliefs that are representative of the globality of the company. In terms of deciding whether to take censorship action, Facebook utilizes a "combination of artificial intelligence and reports from people to identify posts, pictures or other content that likely violates [their] Community Standards". These reports are then looked over by a team of over 7,500 content reviewers who ensure the validity of the claims and decide the most appropriate enforcement action. Facebook is also currently working on expanding their appeals feature, providing people with greater ability to challenge their decisions.

Rules vary from platform to platform. Most regulations are in line with protection of freedom of speech, but some restrictions on certain content fall beyond this limit. These Big Tech companies are often able to censor beyond the legal protections of free speech since they are private companies and not governmental bodies, and thus such regulations would not be considered in direct violation of the law.

Implications for Free Speech:

Because social media companies are privately owned, they are constitutionally allowed to control and limit what consumers post and view on their sites to the extent that they wish. Social media was initially created to allow internet users around the globe to connect with one another and share ideas. However, companies often have to step in and remove or limit access to certain users' accounts that are inciting violence, spreading falsities of some kind, or intruding upon others' free speech. In a 2020 statement on their website, following the growing issue of false information about the COVID-19 pandemic, Twitter explicitly says, "[users] may not use Twitter's services to share false or misleading information about COVID-19 which may lead to harm."

Up until the January 2021 storming of the US Capitol, Facebook and other sites have been hesitant to create true barriers surrounding political figures and the messages they send. In a 2019 speech at Georgetown University, Mark Zuckerberg, the founder and former CEO of Facebook Inc., asserted his ideas that allowing everyone to have a voice "empowers the powerless" and "pushes society to be better over time". However, on January 14, just 8 days after extremists breached the Capitol building, nearly a dozen of the most prominent social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Reddit, Snapchat and more) individually banned President Donald Trump from

accessing or posting on their sites, deeming his usage of the platforms as "inciting violence" and "breaking the terms of service."

As a result, it is critical to question whether censoring COVID-19 information, election information, or information on vaccinations, regardless of if they are true or not, allows everyone to have a voice—one of the central pillars of a free society. The actions of these social media companies has brought into question whether or not it is constitutional to only allow those with opinions agreeable to the company's policy, to use the platform.

Across the European Union, policymakers agree that the method in which predominant platforms, like Facebook and Twitter, filter and allow for the distribution of information presents a massive threat to their users, due to inability to adequately censor. Privacy laws in the EU were increased, though already widespread, when the General Data Protection Regulation was passed in the spring of 2016, protecting "the right of individuals to control access to their personal information" (Brookings). UK lawmakers proposed the creation of a database that is publicly searchable, detailing who paid for an ad, the issue, the period, and the demographics targeted, in order to allow transparency in advertisements.

Following a period of mosque massacres, Australian officials passed a law subjecting social media platforms to massive fines and potential jail time if violent material is not removed from their sites immediately and posts are constantly under surveillance. The Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and French President Emmanuel Macron coordinated to create an international response, the "Christchurch Call," an alliance between government and technology companies that lays out expectations regarding the removal of extremely graphic content. Eighteen countries signed and five American technology companies (Amazon, Facebook, Google, Microsoft, and Twitter) have signed onto the call.

On the more extreme, India has chosen to ban entirely certain apps that it felt created issues in the country. Since June 29, 2020 TikTok has been banned, in a statement by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, saying that the app was "engaged in activities which are prejudicial to sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of state and public order" (Press Information Bureau).

Global Impact and Examples:

The US Capitol Insurrection (January 6th, 2021) serves as a critical example of Big Tech censorship's impact on principles of free speech. Former President Trump touted election fraud claims, disrupted orderly transition of power, and empowered supporters to protest election results. Protest organizers used various online platforms to organize a huge protest at Washington D.C. on January 6th.

Public backlash to the violence brought attention to the companies and sites that made the insurrection possible. On Jan. 8th, 2021, Twitter suspended the @realDonaldTrump account and cited two of the President's tweets earlier in the day, saying "the context around them — specifically how they are being received and interpreted on and off Twitter" violated Twitter's Glorification of Violence policy. President Trump was also removed from Facebook, Youtube, Snapchat, Reddit, Twitch, Shopify, and Instagram. Apple and Google also removed Parler, one of Trump's supporters' most utilized apps, from app stores.

Jack Dorsey, Twitter CEO, expressed his concern for the consequences of such a high profile ban in a Twitter thread, and significantly worried about scrutiny over a political bias and the tech industry's power over public discourse.

Regardless of political views, there were international ramifications. German Chancellor Angela Merkel called Twitter's ban on Trump "problematic," and said that freedom of opinion is an essential right of "elementary significance," French Finance

Minister Bruno Le Maire also condemned the move and said that tech giants were part of a digital oligarchy that was a threat to democracy. Treasurer Josh Frydenberg of the Commonwealth of Australia said he was uncomfortable with Twitter's ban on Trump, remarking that "Those decisions were taken by commercial companies, but personally, I felt uncomfortable with what they did." Alexey Navalny, Russian Opposition Leader, noted that this pattern had been seen before in both Russia and China when big companies utilize their position to become a government best friend and enabler when it comes to state-based censorship laws: "this precedent will be exploited by the enemies of freedom of speech around the world. In Russia as well. Every time when they need to silence someone, they will say: 'this is just common practice, even Trump got blocked on Twitter," he wrote on Twitter.

The power of Big Tech is also exemplified in Facebook's response to Australia's recent attempts to hold social media platforms and other forms of Big Tech accountable for the news they spread. In Australia, Facebook has banned all Australians from reading or sharing news on the platform. This bold move by Facebook has not only stopped the spread of sensational news stories, but has the potential to cripple public awareness of coronavirus restrictions by halting the spread of governmental communications through the platform. This is especially dangerous considering that 52% of Australians' primary news source is social media platforms. Public outcry in response to this latest Big Tech censorship event is immense, one Australian minister branding Big Tech censorship as "an assault on a sovereign nation". Big Tech's immense censorship powers has left Australia in a power struggle between Facebook and government regulations and has left other world leaders cautious to oppose Big Tech for fear that a similar censorship situation will be instituted in their country.

UN INVOLVEMENT

Amid the rise of Big Tech power and the growing threat censorship poses to human rights, the UN has committed to protecting human rights, recognizing that the "same rights that people have offline must also be protected online." The Universal Declaration of Rights lists fundamental human rights, and Big Tech censorship particularly threatens Article 19--the rights to freedom of expression and opinion. Additionally, the UN has also noted that freedom of information is being violated through online censorship and mass surveillance. UN Special Rapporteur David Kaye's report on Content Regulation also highlights these concerns, as he states Big Tech companies must take "radically different approaches" in terms of their corporate policies and "private rules" to align with The Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

The United Nations Commission on Human Rights' (OHCHR) Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) provide businesses with foundational guidelines to protect human rights. These UNGPs establish the standard that businesses should have to protect human rights, specifically stating that " information and communications technology companies may be at particular risk of impacting the rights to privacy or censorship." In order to get Big Tech corporations to align with these principles, the OHCHR launched the B-Tech project, focusing on getting technology companies to adopt the Guiding Principles.

In 2012, OHCHR passed the First Resolution on Internet Free Speech which aimed to directly address the issue of censorship. The resolution states that human rights must be protected online, "in particular freedom of expression". In Resolution

32/13, the OHCHR elaborated on this issue, stating that the UN "condemns unequivocally measures to intentionally prevent or disrupt access to or dissemination of information online" and recognized that these issues have become more prevalent as a result of "the rapid pace of technological development." In 2018, the UNHRC passed A/HRC/38/L.10/Rev.1, which affirmed the UN's commitment to protect freedoms on the internet, and expressed concern that corporate violations of UNGPs have significant consequences. The Digital Cooperation Report, written by a panel appointed by the Secretary General, expressed concerns "especially pressing for social media companies," as the "decisions taken by [these] private companies are increasingly affecting millions of people across national borders". The effects caused by censorship are countless, and include suppressing women's empowerment, hindering the development of infrastructure and innovation, and increasing inequality through limited access to the internet. Amid these issues, it can be recognized that Big Tech censorship hinders Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5's commitment to gender equality, SDG 9's commitment to industry, innovation and infrastructure in LDCs, and SDG 10's commitment to reducing inequalities.

Despite these issues, technology use is still critical to reach all of the SDGs by 2030. The Digital Cooperation Panel echoes the important role of technology and its necessary implementation for "the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to support progress across a range of themes, including digital empowerment, inclusive finance, employment, entrepreneurship, trade and cross border data flows."

BLOC POSITIONS

Countries: 30

<u>Western Nations</u>: US, Germany, France, Australia, UK, Iceland, Canada, Norway (8)

<u>Eastern Europe</u>: Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Russia (4)

<u>Africa</u>: Ghana, Uganda, Eritrea, South Africa, Egypt (5)

<u>Asia + Middle East</u>: China, Vietnam, Iran, India, Japan, Myanmar, Saudi Arabia (7)

<u>Latin America + Carribean</u>: Mexico, Jamaica, Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, Argentina (6)

United States and United Kingdom

The US and UK both stand by the belief that social media companies have the right to make their own decisions on content moderation. The majority of US lawmakers strongly support Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which makes web platforms immune from punishment for actions by individuals using their services. In addition, as expressed by the United Kingdom's Office of Communications, "platforms will need to ensure that illegal content is removed quickly and minimise the risk of it appearing"—reaffirming majority support for platform-led content moderation.

Europe and Australia

The European Union and Australia are both attempting to weaken the power giant tech companies currently hold on the market. The EU is working on two pieces of legislation, the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Digital Markets Act (DMA), whose goals are to create a safer digital space and foster competition in the digital industry. Australia's new media codes require sites such as Google and Facebook to pay

publishers for linking their content. Both companies are now negotiating deals with Australian news sources, whose business models have suffered in the internet age.

Asia and the Middle East

Traditional media in most countries of Asia and the Middle East are almost entirely state run, and a lot of those countries in this committee exercise strict control of their citizens' internet use. The governments in the region would like to play a large role in political censorship on these web platforms. Human rights groups that want social media companies to apply their censorship policies more evenly across the globe are often using political figures from these regions as examples for more censorship.

Africa

The African bloc also opposes the ability of private companies to affect the political power of politicians, and many African politicians have yet to utilize the full power of social media, like some of their equivalents around the world. This was best seen in Uganda's recent presidential election where a popular Ugandan celebrity launched a successful social media campaign to challenge sitting president Yoweri Museveni. Museveni in response, shut down the internet two days prior to election day and made it impossible for citizens to even open Facebook and Twitter.

Latin America and the Carribean

Many political figures from Latin America, such as President "AMLO" of Mexico and Eduardo Bolsonaro of Brazil (President Jair Bolsonaro) blasted Twitter's decision to ban Donald Trump on social media. Bolsonaro said it was wrong for leaders, like Venezuela's Maduro, to be allowed on the platform and not President Trump. On the

other side, Reporters without Borders ranks Jamaica as one of the top countries for freedom of information and political speech.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Based on your country's policy, what actions would result in political censorship?
  - What are protected vs. unprotected forms of speech?
- Should social media/big tech platforms subsidize news?
- What are some incentives for companies to better fight misinformation and harmful/manipulative speech?
  - How does this committee influence largely American corporations as an international organization that is tasked with respecting national sovereignty?
  - What should a company's terms of service and content warnings contain?
- What is the role of government in online censorship?
- What countries are models of good free speech and reasonable censorship?
- What is the effect of political censorship on public trust?
- What role can the UNCSTD serve in this issue?
- What is the relationship between big tech companies and governments in censoring citizens? Do governments use big tech companies to facilitate censorship to any extent?
- Is it constitutional to only allow those whose ideas the company agrees with to speak on a publicly used platform? Or, is it beneficial, as fewer potentially nonfactual ideas are being spread?

REFERENCES

[JackrabbitMUN III - Big Tech Censorship References](#)