

The First Amendment promises American citizens freedom of expression. But where do we draw the line? Recently, the use of social media has posed this question. There are restrictions on what you can post when using apps such as Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube. Some people believe that this is a violation of the First Amendment. Others argue that apps should control the content released on their platforms. As we move into the future with social media, this topic asks for a modern interpretation of the First Amendment.

A strong argument in favor of social media platforms' right to restrict content is public safety. Unchecked content on sites such as 4chan and Reddit has spread and nurtured conspiracy theories, leading to violent offenses by their believers. These include conspiracies such as 'Pizzagate', the 'New World Order', and 'QAnon', which are all closely related. In 2018, Matthew Wright blocked a bridge in Arizona with a heavily armed vehicle. He was arrested and pleaded guilty to terrorism. He later wrote letters from jail to Donald J. Trump that included QAnon slogans from social media. This same internet theory is blamed as one of the motivators behind the January 6th Insurrection. Due to these past events, many believe certain posts should be removed or restricted to avoid the spread of dangerous conspiracy theories that lead to violence.

Those in opposition to social media regulation claim that it is unconstitutional. In regards to the First Amendment, they claim that freedom of speech and expression includes posts on social media as well. Social media has become a part of our daily lives and is used by many as a way to express themselves. Recently, privacy concerns have pushed the U.S. government to attempt to ban the popular social media app TikTok. This is a point of contention with U.S. citizens. With social media, we can communicate with people around the world in various ways: we share our opinions on current topics, send and receive content, and watch or upload videos. Restricting these activities could limit citizens' access to freedom of expression.

The question is: to restrict, or not to restrict. Today, many social media companies are battling with this divisive question raised by the public. Some have remained very lax with content regulation, and others have increased regulations. In an increasingly digital world, historic legislation like the Constitution must agree with new technology, and either could be subject to change.

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