# Worksheet 6 Social, legal and cultural issues Answers

**Task 1**

Use the Internet to find answers to the following questions:

1. How many people in the UK are registered on Facebook?

According to the following site, about 30 million were registered on Facebook in 2015

<http://www.rosemcgrory.co.uk/2017/01/03/uk-social-media-statistics-for-2017>

How many UK adults use Twitter?

According to the same statistics site, about 12.4 million UK adults used Twitter in early 2015

2 What steps is Twitter taking to reduce hateful content and abusive behaviour?

<https://blog.twitter.com/official/en_us/topics/company/2017/safetypoliciesdec2017.html>

e.g. Removing accounts that affiliate with organisations that use or promote violence against civilians to further their causes

Removing content that glorifies violence or threatens others

What steps is Twitter taking to prevent the spread of misinformation?

<https://blog.twitter.com/official/en_us/topics/company/2017/Our-Approach-Bots-Misinformation.html>

Increasing efforts to detect bots and spam, suspending accounts, stopping potentially manipulative bots at source

3. Look up the site <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-39830727> and read the article “Facebook – the secret election weapon”.

Explain in your own words how a social media site can persuade people to have a particular point of view and influence elections.

Advertisers can specify the profiles of people they want to target. Prior to the UK referendum in 2016 on whether to leave the European Union, for example, political strategists targeted sections of the population depending on their jobs, where they lived, and likely concerns to persuade them that their jobs might be threatened if the UK stayed in/left the EU, taxes might be increased/decreased, etc.

4. Look up “How fake news spreads on social media” in a search engine and note down some of the points made, referencing the sites you visit

(Open question)

e.g. <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2017-08-31/why-fake-news-spreads-so-fast-on-facebook>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/20/health/social-media-fake-news.html>

<https://ed.ted.com/on/h01kSlpF#review>

5. “Social networking sites improve the quality of people’s lives.” List some arguments for and against this statement. (Try a Google search on “social networking – good or bad?”)

<http://socialnetworking.procon.org/view.answers.php?questionID=001614>

Martin Baily, PhD, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, stated the following in a 15 February 2008 entry titled "Is MySpace Good for Society? A Freakonomics Quorum," from the "Freakonomics" blog hosted by the New York Times:

*“The pluses include easier contacts with friends, and increased chances to make new friends and create a community, as well as find romantic relationships. Even the advertising may be a plus, because it is targeted to the particular interests of the user.*

“*The minuses are that all of this sharing can be dangerous, through gossip and potential abuse of the services. Examples include reported suicides linked to malicious gossip circulated on a social network. Some people become addicted to life on the computer screen, and withdraw from personal contact — it's a long way from people sitting on the porch talking to friends and neighbors...”*

6. List some instances where social media sites have been a great force for good in a crisis situation, and some instances in which they have brought devastating consequences to individuals or society.

The procon.org site as mentioned before describes the effect of social media after the Haiti earthquake in 2010:

<http://socialnetworking.procon.org/view.source.php?sourceID=009454>

Ben Parr wrote in response to the question “Are Social Networking sites good for our society?”

“*After a magnitude 7.0 earthquake (and multiple aftershocks) devastated the nation of Haiti [on Jan. 12, 2010], social media became the medium in which everybody spread the word. Dramatic Haiti earthquake Twitter pictures swept across the web, while tech giants mobilized. The most impressive part of social media's impact on Haiti has to be the charity text message campaign that has already raised more than $10 million for Haiti victim relief. Social media spread the word, technology made it possible...”*

*The following BBC web page describes one instance of the harm that a website can potentially do. A father describes how his son accessed suicide websites and eventually committed suicide.*

[*http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/5328550.stm*](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/5328550.stm)

*"He had also been into chatrooms where people had been discussing suicide. I am not saying if he had not been on the internet he would not have done it.*

*"We also found out he had been deeply depressed, but I believe the internet gave him the means to do it.”*

**Task 2**

1. Read the article “When an algorithm helps send you to prison” from the New York Times, 26 October 2017.

[*https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/26/opinion/algorithm-compas-sentencing-bias.html*](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/26/opinion/algorithm-compas-sentencing-bias.html)

The article describes how a man who pleaded guilty in court to driving a car without the owner’s consent and attempting to flee an officer was sentenced to six years in prison and five years of extended supervision. The judge justified this sentence on the grounds that the software COMPAS, a risk assessment algorithm, predicted a high rate of recidivism (reoffending).

1. Explain with reference to this scenario how algorithms may embed moral and cultural values.

Algorithms reflect the data that are used to train them. If the training data shows that offenders with certain gender, race or educational for example, characteristically have a higher rate of reoffending, these patterns are used to calculate the risk of the accused reoffending. Individuals do not necessarily follow the statistical patterns of the data set and this may not be taken into account by the algorithm.

1. Why does the software manufacturer refuse to disclose the details of how the algorithm works?

It is commercial software and the company does not want anyone else to copy their ideas and take some of their market share

1. Give a reason why a court may use an algorithm, rather than the judge himself, to carry out a risk assessment which is used in the sentencing decision.

There is a chance that the judge may be intentionally or unintentionally biased when handing down a sentence. The courts trust that a computer will be less biased than even a well-meaning judge. Using a computer should lead to the same sentence being given no matter who the judge was, for a particular offender.

For further information, you can also download the article *“Algorithm guilty of bias? Study queries program’s use in courts”* from *The Guardian 18 January 2018,* which describes the use of COMPAS software.

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/jan/17/software-no-more-accurate-than-untrained-humans-at-judging-reoffending-risk>

2. How ethical is YouTube’s algorithm, which looks through billions of videos to identify 20 “Up next” clips that are relevant to a previous video and most likely to hold a viewer’s attention?

Read the article at <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/feb/02/how-youtubes-algorithm-distorts-truth>

The algorithm does not distinguish between ethically and morally acceptable content and evil, negative, harmful content. It requires thousands of human moderators to remove bad content. Is YouTube’s policing strategy for its 1.5 billion users as effective as it could be? “The algorithm does not appear to be optimising for what is truthful, or balanced, or healthy for democracy” (Guillaume Chaslot, and ex-Google engineer).

**Task 3**

1. Are there laws against Internet trolls, cyberbullying and hate sites?

There are laws against trolls. See for example:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-29678989>

There are a number of laws which can be applied to cases of cyberbullying, hate sites and sites promoting terrorism - see for example:

<https://www.cybersmile.org/advice-help/category/cyberbullying-and-the-law>

<http://report-it.org.uk/reporting_internet_hate_crime>

2. What are the challenges facing legislators and law enforcers in the digital age?

The rapid growth of online applications and behaviour makes it difficult for legislators to keep up. Internet crime is international, but laws in one country cannot always be applied in another country.

Enforcement is difficult. Is the crime local, national or international? Who are the criminals and where are they? Ending anonymity on the Internet could have serious consequences for dissenters in some countries. Cybercriminals exploit the rights and privileges of a free society, including anonymity.

<http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/it-security/what-makes-cybercrime-laws-so-difficult-to-enforce/>

3. Describe briefly two types of wearable device. What legal issues arise in connection to such wearable devices?

Look up the article “Legal challenges of wearable computing”, 30 April 2014 to help answer this question.

<https://www.swlegal.ch/getdoc/5ff2741a-6e1e-4108-99c7-8dc1566f21b2/140731_Roland-Mathys_Paper-Legal-Challenges-of-Wea.aspx>

<http://www.owletcare.com>

**Gaming and lifestyle devices**, devised to facilitate certain activities, e.g. Google Glass

**Safety and prevention products**, designed to help keep the user safe (e.g. firefighters) or to monitor babies’ heart rate, temperature etc. (e.g. Owlet smart sock)

**Sports and fitness devices**, monitoring speed, distance force etc.

**Devices for health care** – contact lenses for monitoring blood glucose levels in diabetics, artificial pancreas, metering devices for blood pressure etc.

Legal issues – Data Protection and privacy issues – the amount of data collected and processed by wearable devices may be enormous, and can be attributed to an individual wearer. What implications does this have for the privacy of the wearer?

Under the Data Protection Act, data collected should be collected only for one or more specified purposes, and should be adequate, relevant and not excessive in relation to the purposes for which they are processed. Yet data from wearable systems may be used for countless purposes ranging from research to direct marketing.