

DISS 790 – Information Policy: Assignment A
Public Policy and Governance in a World of Digital Information

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The paper that follows was submitted to satisfy the requirements of DISS 790 – Information Policy: Assignment A. In the following pages, the paper answered five questions. Those questions were:

1. What are the subtle, but important differences between "control of information" and its "management" or "organization"?
2. What role should the private sector have in distributing government information?
3. Should the U.S. have a stricter policy regarding the international dissemination of its scientific and technical information?
4. What are some possible impacts on relationships between citizens and governments due to ubiquitous, intelligent networking?
5. In terms of information policy, what does Jeremy Rifkin mean by his statement...“all government is derivative”?

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Task 1

Some view government involvement in information policy as a means of asserting government control over information. Describe the subtle, but important differences between "control of information" and its "management" or "organization."

Information continues to increase dramatically. In fact, 1,000 to 2,000 new books are published daily around the world (White & Dorman, 2000, September). The vast amount of information being created must be managed to be useful. While technology is in large part responsible for the explosion of information, it also provides a number of tools to manage it (e.g. databases and search engines). In addition, technology has made the control of information both harder and easier. In the past, paper-based information was easier to control in comparison to today's digital information, which can be published worldwide in a matter of seconds. However, technology has also provided tools to easily locate, scan, and filter all types of digital information.

Information policy creates the guidelines within which information is controlled (i.e. created, stored, distributed, retrieved, and used) by citizens (Burger, 1993). There is a fine line dividing the "control" and the "management" of information. Webster's dictionary defines control as the ability to exercise restraining or governing influence over something (Webster, 1913). Management is defined as the act of guiding by careful or delicate treatment. However, another definition of management is to make subservient by artful conduct. Management when taken to the extreme becomes synonymous with control.

One way to describe the subtle differences between the management and the control of information is with a couple of examples. The United Kingdom (U.K.) government recently granted itself the power to access e-mail and other encrypted

Internet communications (Rohde, 2000, September 4). The Regulation of Investigatory Powers (RIP) Act of 2000 requires Internet service providers (ISPs) in the U.K. to track all data traffic passing through their computers and to route it to a government center. Technology will play a key role in carrying out the new policy since some ISPs doubt they will be able to acquire the technology required to comply with the law. In this example, is the U.K. government seeking to control or to simply manage the flow of e-mail?

In comparison, the United States (U.S.) government is using a system that the FBI calls Carnivore to monitor specific e-mail messages (Rohde, 2000, September 4). Carnivore works by selectively locating the e-mail of persons targeted in ongoing FBI investigations. The system does not monitor all traffic moving across an ISP's servers (as mandated by RIP in the U.K.) but sees only a subset of that data. Is the U.S. government's implementation of Carnivore an attempt to manage or to control the flow of e-mail?

In the examples provided above, the RIP act in the U.K. would be best classified as the control of information and the FBI's implementation of Carnivore as the management of information. Both rely on the ability of technology to either monitor all (RIP) or a small subset (Carnivore) of the information passing through an ISP's e-mail server. The degree of selectivity employed is one measure of whether the governments intended to manage or to control the information.

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Task 2

What role should the private sector have in distributing government information?

In the future, the private sector will perform an increasing number of government services (Goodman, 2000). This is in part a result of government's slow reaction to rapid changes in technology and the private sector's ability to respond quickly to such change. In fact, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) circular A-130 required government agencies to seek private sector involvement in planning of information activities.

In many cases, the private sector has demonstrated the ability to outperform the government in distributing government information (Fought, 1997, September-b). Government at all levels is tempted to turn public information over to private companies for reasons that include a shortage of funds and the lack of technical expertise to efficiently catalog and distribute the information. However, issues related to the transfer of government services to the private sector are being raised. These include the possible loss of access to public information and the reluctance of citizens to pay for the information twice (once to create it and once to retrieve and view it).

Threat to Access

One example cited by access activists to justify their concern is the case of DuPage County in west suburban Chicago. The county contracted with Ameritech to put court records on-line using its CivicLink service (Tapscott, 1995). CivicLink allows citizens to search, retrieve, and print copies of public records over the Internet. Fees for the service range from \$2 to \$7, depending on the type of search performed. The typical CivicLink search is performed in five to ten minutes as compared to a trip to the

courthouse, which could take hours. The drawback to the agreement between county and Ameritech was that the company obtained exclusive control of the court's electronic records (Fought, 1997, September-b). No one else could distribute the records on-line, and no one else could access the records within the first 72 hours of existence.

Double-dipping the Taxpayer

Another concern raised is that the public is being double-dipped. Citizens pay to create and store government information and are also required to pay a surcharge to view and print it (Fought, 1997, September). However, some consumers are willing to pay for the convenience of searching electronic records.

In summary, outsourcing the production and dissemination of government information leverages the efficiencies of the private sector (Shapiro & Varian, 1997, July 30). In fact, third parties now perform the bulk of government basic and statistical research. Outsourcing provides the benefits of competition (i.e. reduced cost and increased speed) and should be used whenever practical to distribute government information. However, sensitive information (e.g. intelligence, IRS, and Social Security) should not be included.

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Task 3

Should the U.S. have a stricter policy regarding the international dissemination of its scientific and technical information?

The U.S. government's nationalist motives have limited the international dissemination of scientific and technical information (STI). For example, national security concerns were the basis for government efforts to limit encryption exports (O'Connor, 2000, January 3). Although the limitations were reduced last fall, the export ban had the negative effect of moving the center of encryption technology from the U.S. to countries in the Middle East and Europe.

In the future, the majority of STI will be published and available on the Internet. Territorial-based information policies will be ineffective in this environment. Cyberspace does not recognize geographic boundaries, and policies based upon geography are not workable in the on-line environment (Johnson & Post, 1996, May). Efforts to control the flow of electronic STI across international borders will prove futile for countries that wish to participate in global electronic commerce.

In summary, the U.S. should not have a stricter policy regarding the international dissemination of STI. STI is a vital part of global electronic commerce. Further limiting its flow out of the U.S. will have the reactionary affect of reducing STI information flow into the country. The dissemination of STI worldwide is a force for public good and should be limited only when the reasons are weighed carefully (Russon, 1996, April).

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Task 4

What are some possible impacts on relationships between citizens and governments due to ubiquitous, intelligent networking?

As the reach of ubiquitous, intelligent networking (the Internet and Internet applications) continues to grow, the relationships between citizens and governments are being significantly affected. A couple of the many impacts on these relationships include the enabling of citizens (i.e. self-service government) and a continued loss of privacy.

Enabling Citizens

Washington and Arizona have demonstrated how new technologies are able to alleviate the headaches of doing business with government by enabling citizens to do much of the work themselves (Maxwell, 2000, July). These states provide excellent examples of how the Internet has positively impacted the relationships between citizens and their governments. For example, Arizona citizens were the first to conduct a binding primary election on-line. They are also able to track legislation over the Internet. Other on-line government services in the state include vehicle registration, coordination of children's social security, and change of address processing for drivers' licenses.

Like Arizona, Washington State is working to provide services and information when and where citizens demand them (Blake, 2000, July). Washington residents are able to download voter registration forms and obtain information about candidates, issues, and political parties. Washington also enables citizens with "Find-It Washington" – a service that allows individuals and businesses to locate and access all types of public records.

In the future, both citizens and government will benefit from society's growing connectivity. Citizens will profit from increased government accessibility and quicker

response time, while governments will cut costs and improve reliability.

Continued loss of privacy

In contrast to the positive impact described above, Internet technologies will aid government in keeping a better eye on citizens. For example, in the next few years, the majority of big corporations are planning to use “smart” employee identification tags to locate employees and to assist with timekeeping (McGinity, 2000, September). This information would be instantly available to governments in a wired world. In addition, global positioning systems (GPSs) will shortly be standard equipment inside cellular telephones sold in the United States. Companies have used similar systems for years to track assets such as courier trucks.

As online financial transactions, credit cards, and eventually smartcards continue to replace the exchange of cash, governments will gain the information needed to automatically fill out the tax returns for most citizens. Internet transaction monitoring systems such as the FBI’s Carnivore will also increase in numbers. The end result will be continued loss of personal privacy.

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Task 5

In terms of information policy, what does Jeremy Rifkin mean by his statement...“all government is derivative”?

Jeremy Rifkin’s statement is meant to remind business and government leaders that markets and government were established in response to community needs – not the reverse (Ferry, 2000, May). In the future, Rifkin sees the role of community as becoming equal to that of markets and government. Government’s new role will be to partner with the “third sector” (community) and create a seamless web of relationships between national, state, and local government. The third sector will serve to balance the effects of globalization.

Society (through its information policy) determines what, when, where, and how information is used and disseminated (Burger, 1993). In order to balance the effects of globalization, information policies will need to recognize the value of local cohesive social action as well as strong international trade. In addition, government information policy will need to foster a partnership between government and the third sector. This partnership will serve to offset the forces of globalization and global business.

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