

Students debate YikYak

To ban - or - Not to ban

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So by now almost everyone on campus, both faculty and students, have contemplated the e-mail sent last week about the mobile app “Yik Yak”. For the few of you who don’t know what that is, Yik Yak is an app that allows you to anonymously post short blurbs that can be seen and commented on by people in your local area.

Of course, the reason this is so controversial is because our school took the huge step of banning it from the BC domain. Now some of you may have questioned why the school took this step or even wondered why it’s such a big deal to begin with, and to that I say “look at the research”. Unsurprisingly, we aren’t the first school, or even the first collegiate level institution to take this step.

Yik Yak made its first appearance in November of last year, and within 5 months earned 1.5 million dollars in funding, and over 100,000 users in 3 months. Basically, it was a hit. The idea was that college kids would have a place to post uninhibited commentary on “what really happens” on campus. You would no longer have to hide your crappy sex life, your hung-over shame, or the fact that you didn’t study for bio, instead you yak about it. However, what started out as a good idea, quickly took a turn for the worst.

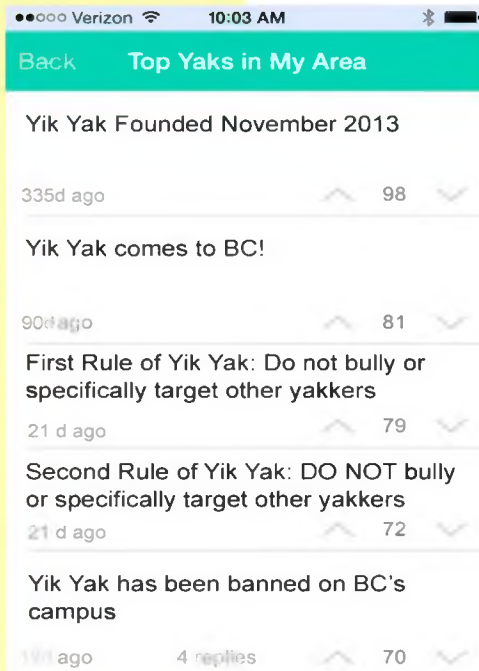
Before I go any further, I’m going to give you a few statistics to give you an idea of what the bigger picture is here. Suicide is the third leading cause of death among college aged youths, resulting in around 4,400 deaths annually. More adolescents die from suicide than from cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, stroke, pneumonia, influenza, and chronic lung disease, combined. People who are the victims of bullying are 2-9 times more likely to commit suicide, and 1 in every 3 people has been cyber bullied.

Cyberbullying is defined as “the use of electronic communication to bully a person, typically by sending messages of an intimidating or threatening nature.” By now you’re probably thinking “I never threatened anyone”, however, the fact of the matter is that a lot of people do. Also, Yik Yak is known for having posts that are racist, sexist, homophobic, and demeaning overall. If you don’t believe me, I took the time to post some yaks from local schools that embody this type of behavior. “South Alabama kids are inbred and smell like moldy water.” “If men cared about the rights of women, women would have rights, because we have the ability to give them to you, we just don’t want to.” “Fat girls in leggings... Look like pigs in a blanket.” “Do internationals think American girls are whores????” “When did the term gay become LGBTQQIA?” “Sociology is teaching me that everyone hates black people.”

Some of you might have read those and thought they were funny, but the fact of the matter is that they were all somewhat offensive. A lot of hatred is being spread over Yik Yak. People are using the app to sexually harass and prey on others. However, the overwhelming show of ignorance and immaturity isn’t the only issue. Recently, colleges have had to deal with students threatening the safety of others. In both New Jersey and Indiana students have been ar-

Do you yak a yak, or do you yik a yak? It is quite a mystery which is the noun and which is the verb. I think you must yik a yak, but it’s a sensitive subject for a lot of people. Urban dictionary offers some quality insight in stating that Yik Yak is, “A mobile app college kids use to anonymously talk [bad] and post witty things to people nearby.” The founders of Yik Yak state that it is simply, “social messaging app for hyper-local engagement.” What exactly does that mean, and how do people misuse it?

On a small campus, the application was used as it would be on other campuses, with mostly harmless fun with the occasional user needing to be removed from the site, but it hit harder to home. It’s much easier to deduce



who someone is “yikking” or “yakkling” about since there are less than 800 students. The anonymity was used more like a game of who could talk the biggest game, and if you could figure out who they were talking about. This created a big problem in places like the cafeteria and other large gatherings because it’s obvious when someone would say something harmful and point out “the girl with the red shirt and vans” or “the guy with the purple sweater and ripped jeans”. At a bigger university, there would be more people around that would fit that same description at any given time.

The administration sent out an email on Sept. 25, stating that yikyak.com and its mobile applications would not be functional on the BC wireless network. This is the first time that a social network or any website comparable has been blocked from the network. The Acceptable Use Policy states that, “Harassment of other users may be the sending of unwanted messages or files. Violations include, but are not limited to interfering with the legitimate work of another user, sending abusive or obscene messages, viewing of materials that may be considered offensive in a public setting, and using computer resources to engage in abuse of other users.” Yik Yak isn’t an application that was invented to be used for bullying-the website even says as much, deleting a user if they

are reported for bullying or are using it inappropriately.

The administration didn’t take any action aside from blocking the site. There was no warnings or suggestions prior to the cut-off of the social media site and application. There has not yet been any information released further about the issues and dangers of cyber bullying since the email that was sent out.

Syracuse University in Vermont has also had Yik Yak banned from the campus. An article from “The Daily Orange” said, “The problem is not the anonymous platform, but the people on it. Universities should concentrate on the motivation [behind] offensive speech, not on limiting the platforms it appears on.” It is true that there are so many other forms of social media on which cyber bullying can occur, but blocking Yik Yak can be an effective part of a solution. It cannot be our only answer, however. If all that happens is that the Yik Yak craze at BC is over, that won’t fix the larger issue of cyber bullying in general. There needs to be some way to discuss the issue

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