

Kevon Turner

DON'T BE EVIL: MAKING SENSE OF VALUE CONFLICTS IN WORLD CULTURE

The Case of Google

Faculty of Social Sciences

Master's Thesis

April 2021

ABSTRACT

Kevon Turner: Don't Be Evil: Making Sense of Value Conflicts in World Culture

The Case of Google

Master's Thesis

Tampere University

Master's Degree Programme in Global and Transnational Sociology

April 2021

It has been demonstrated that Google, a microcosm and exemplar of Big Tech, has both flourished commercially, while faltering culturally. This state of tension is underscored by their simultaneous, conflicting commitments to universal accessibility and individual privacy and freedoms. While the antitrust lawsuits leveled against Google show a rebuke of their alleged anticompetitive practices, their position of dominance in the industry shows no sign of letting up. World culture theory explains that such conflicts are inherent in actors, organizations, and world society as a whole. However, there lacks a comprehensive explanation that addresses this phenomenon. Such a gap creates an opportunity to identify and investigate a bona fide example of this concept. This thesis investigates how world-cultural norms and values and their mutual conflicts become visible in the processes in which modern organizations build (and lose) their authority.

In the case of Google and its pending federal antitrust lawsuits, framing theory can reveal much about the world cultural norm conflicts in play and how Google endeavors to remain a model business and model world cultural actor despite their ongoing judicial scrutiny. Through framing, communicators interested in the antitrust cases are able to take the existing world cultural norms and apply them for or against Google as a way to vindicate or villainize them. Therefore, framing theory helps us understand this phenomenon by demonstrating the key frames within the discourse as dictated by world cultural norms. The conflicts in question will play out via the dialogue surrounding Google Inc., and by extension, Big Tech in general.

Keywords: world culture, value conflicts, cultural norms, framing theory, google, big tech, antitrust

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin Originality Check service.

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. GOOGLE LLC AND BIG TECH	2
1.2. THE PARADOX OF ANTITRUST LAW	3
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	7
2.2. WORLD CULTURAL VALUE CONFLICT AND BIG TECH	8
2.3. CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY	13
2.4. THE HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY OF CSR	14
2.5. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM	16
3. DATA AND METHODS	19
3.1. FRAMING THEORY	19
3.2. DATA	22
4. ANALYSIS	24
4.1. FRAME: GOOGLE AS A FAIR COMPETITOR	24
4.2. FRAME: GOOGLE AS HELPING CONSUMERS	28
4.3. FRAME: THE EFFICACY OF ANTITRUST LAW	34
5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	38
BIBLIOGRAPHY	41

1. Introduction

What do you know about your phone? You probably know the year you bought it, and how much you bought it for. If you're a tech aficionado, you may also know things such as how much storage it has, and whether the storage is expandable. You might know what kind of processor it has, and the resolution of the screen. You know there's a new one coming out soon, and the manufacturer promises it'll be a groundbreaking piece of technology when it comes out.

Now, what does your phone know about *you*? Or to be specific, what does the software on your phone know about you? It knows where you live and where you work. It knows where you like to shop, and who your best friends are. It knows what your dog looks like, it knows where you want to go on vacation, and it remembers what you were looking up a month ago. Your phone reflects its knowledge of you in applications that help you reach destinations and access information faster than ever. Your phone also reflects its knowledge of you in the advertisements it innocuously presents to you. Sometimes it may feel as if your device knows you better than you know yourself.

How is this so? Technology that promotes accessibility and ease of use inexorably comes with a caveat: your privacy. Technology that expedites the processes of user input consequently railroads users to (and away from) certain choices. As society continues to embrace technological advances that make utility of user input, we begin to realize that instead of using our devices, it is our devices that use *us*. The byproduct of this phenomenon is an omniscient organization with such a foothold in the user's life that they are inoculated from using any other products (or not using the product at all). Enter: Google LLC and Big Tech.

This research aims to understand the phenomenon of underlying value conflicts in the ubiquity and utility of Google LLC's services and product offerings by studying the discourse surrounding Google's business practices while embroiled in U.S. federal antitrust lawsuits. The data sample in question consists of 28 articles from 11 sources over the span of 12 weeks surrounding the filing of the cases against Google. By studying the frames presented within this discourse, this study will unearth the embedded value conflicts associated with Google.

1.1. Google LLC and Big Tech

Google LLC (henceforth referred to as Google) started from humble beginnings to become one of the largest corporations in the world, integrated into virtually every aspect of modern life. Founded in 2006 by two Stanford University students, Google Inc. initially served as an attempt to facilitate and expedite the online search process; their algorithm prioritized and ranked webpages on the basis of how many pages linked back to it. In 2015, Google became a subsidiary of Alphabet Inc., its newly formed holding company that would become the home of Google as we know it, as well as other Google-adjacent companies such as Google X and Google Nest. Now Google LLC post-restructuring, Google has become bigger than ever. With hands in a myriad of markets including mobile handsets, cloud gaming, personal computers, and advertising—the tech conglomerate's main source of profit—Google enjoys a success unseen by any private corporation prior. In fact, this unprecedented growth is what makes Google an anomaly. (Valinsky & Sherman, 2018)

Big Tech commonly refers to the companies that dominate the information technology space, primarily Google, Facebook, Twitter, Apple, Amazon and Microsoft.

Sometimes it refers more generally to Silicon Valley, the hub for tech juggernauts and startups alike.

The United States' love story with Big Tech began in the 90's, as innovation in the technology industry, spurred by the advent of the internet, led to high interest in stock market speculation, enthusiastic consumer use, and an economic boom. Fast-forward to today, despite the valuation of these companies soaring, and their brands being much more ubiquitous, that same infatuation with Big Tech has since withered. Now, Big Tech has more skeptics than ever, and has even come under scrutiny from the United States government itself. Between October 20 and December 17, 2020, state governments had piled on three separate antitrust lawsuits against Google LLC.

1.2. The Paradox of Antitrust Law

Altogether, antitrust law is a broadly defined, moving target of a concept. The core idea behind antitrust law is that there needs to be legislative limits to prevent anticompetitive business operations and promote a healthily competitive free market to the benefit of the consumer and the economy as a whole. Examples of business practices deemed anticompetitive include mergers that attempt to give dominant control to certain parties, exclusive supply chain deals, and price fixing. In the context of antitrust legislation, "trust" refers to a group of businesses that collaborate to gatekeep a certain industry, its prices, and market share. However, the identification of practices that are "anticompetitive," "limiting trade," or "monopolizing" is not cut and dried. Antitrust law is often subject to interpretation and indeed, is given meaning through court rulings and the evolving discipline of economics.

On October 4, 2020 The United States House Judiciary Committee's Antitrust Subcommittee released a 450-page report detailing the recommendation for antitrust law reform and caustic measures taken against Big Tech companies for anticompetitive behavior. The report was released by the United States government after concluding a 16-month investigation into Big Tech's business practices. The report specifically names Apple, Amazon, Google, and Facebook as the main perpetrators of anticompetitive conduct. This report would set in motion the resultant antitrust lawsuits.

On October 20, 2020, the United States Department of Justice, along with the States of Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, South Carolina and Texas filed an antitrust lawsuit against Google LLC for using anticompetitive tactics in its "attempts to monopolize" (<https://justice.gov>). In the complaint, the Department of Justice alleges that Google has entered into deals that force users to accept its already dominant search engine as the de facto option; this includes deals with Apple that make Google the default search engine on their Safari browser, deals with device manufacturers that make Google's search app preinstalled and undeletable, and agreements that forbid the preinstallation of other search options. This complaint essentially accuses Google of using bad faith business practices to eliminate competition in a market that already disproportionately favors it.

On December 17, 2020, a coalition led by Colorado consisting of over 30 states, Guam, and the District of Columbia, filed an additional lawsuit boasting the same complaints with an additional accusation of stymieing competition using their grip on general web search. (In doing this, the complaint asserts, Google "[denies] interoperability with competing search engine advertising features, thus harming advertisers who are deprived of the best choices available to them" and "hinders consumers' ability to access information provided by specialized vertical providers in certain lucrative commercial

segments—such as travel, home improvement, and entertainment—by limiting those firms’ ability to acquire customers” (<https://coag.gov>). You may note that some use “searching” and “Googling” interchangeably when it comes to internet search. This lawsuit asserts that this phenomenon is no accident.

A third lawsuit against Google spearheaded by Texas with the support of Arkansas, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Utah, attacks Google on the side of their web advertising, which they hold a disproportionate influence in as well. The suit also name-checks another tech giant, claiming that Google has an “anticompetitive agreement with Facebook, making misrepresentations to users and customers, and suppressing competition” (<http://texasattorneygeneral.gov>). This was filed on December 16, 2020, a day before the Colorado-led case.

Though these cases break new ground, the concept of taking Big Tech to court is not altogether unprecedented. Within the timeframe of the three U.S. cases against Google, another was filed against Facebook Inc. by the Federal Trade Commission, an entity charged with protecting American consumers, on December 9, 2020. Their argument is that Facebook is also engaging in anticompetitive practices to protect their social media monopoly through a strategy that includes their acquisitions of social media platform Instagram in 2012 and messaging client WhatsApp in 2014, and other instances of anticompetitive platform conduct (<http://ftc.gov>). Google has also faced multiple antitrust cases in the EU; however, the lawsuits on American soil indicate a paradigm shift.

Notably, in 1998, antitrust law was successfully applied against Microsoft, which was found guilty for excessively bundling software onto the Windows operating system, making it difficult to uninstall, and also making it difficult for users to install competitor’s software. In this case, it was argued that Microsoft used its operating system

to illegally stifle competition. As part of the ruling, Microsoft was mandated to separate into two separate entities: one for Microsoft, and the other for Windows. This aspect would later be overturned in an appeal, but the guilty verdict set an important precedent for antitrust law in the future, and Big Tech was effectively put on notice. (Economides, N., & Lianos, I., 2009).

Why the sudden pivot on Google, Facebook, and Big Tech in general?

According to the public discourse, consumers and government officials from both sides of the American political aisle have felt that Big Tech has been too powerful and too influential for too long. Breaking up monopolies on the grounds of anticompetitive practices isn't new either. Knowing this, one may ask why actions to stifle Big Tech haven't yet taken hold. The answer provided (within the public discourse) is this: the allegations of monopolizing through antitrust practices have yet to be properly substantiated. Big Tech's defense is that they offer the best products, and their success is a direct result of free consumer choice. The burden lies on Big Tech's critics to prove that their monopolies are a result of anything other than providing consumers premium service through their products (Rainey, 2019).

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. World Culture and World Society Theory

In trying to understand the conflicts that belie the Big Tech phenomenon, world society theory is an effective paradigm to apply. The emerging crisis facing Big Tech has yet to be empirically observed; world culture scholarship provides the necessary tools for understanding this subject.

In *World Polity, World Culture, World Society*, George Thomas provides definitions for the three titular concepts. World polity denotes the shift from realistic modes of thinking, where nation-states were the de facto power brokers of the world. The embrace of globalism led to a shift in our understanding of the existing power dynamics. Placing authority, interests, ideals and action into a broader, non-territorial context sets the standard for world polity and the ensuing world culture theory. World culture, then, is the context of interconnectedness wherein in the newfound “stateless” regime can be enacted, and world society is the greater field of actors who engage in it. (2009)

The need for world culture theory emerged from a scholarly need to make sense of standardized global processes, typically attributed to rational independent actors and purely economic factors. World culture scholars understand culture as more than the arts, which is what the term “culture” has been relegated to in classical realist disciplines, but as *cultivated* reality and structures that are created, influenced, and performed by global actors. On the international level, INGOs and IGOs craft and diffuse world-cultural standards that are manifest within national and domesticated structures and organizations, reaffirming this greater phenomenon of world culture. (Boli, 2005)

Boli also argues that world culture continues to grow, expand into rational domains, and become generally more ubiquitous as models for actors (individuals, governments,

companies) evolve into more structured and complex scripts with suggested norms and ideal outcomes. Indeed, as world culture expands, organizations and the means of organizing things do as well. This phenomenon can be tied to the boom of INGOs and global actors as vehicles of cultural norms and ideals. With this comes an emphasis on actorhood, rationalization, individuation, and global authority. As Meyer et al. (1997) state:

“Prevailing social theories account poorly for these changes. Given a dynamic sociocultural system, realist models can account for a world of economic and political absorption, inequality, and domination. They do not well explain a world of formally equal, autonomous, and expansive nation-state actors. Microcultural or phenomenological lines of argument can account for diversity and resistance to homogenization, not a world in which national states, subject to only modest coercion or control, adopt standard identities and structural forms.” (p. 174)

World culture theory establishes a change in the status quo for global processes, authorities and knowledge. The limits of realist accounts become apparent when unexpected iterations of homogeneity occur between nation-states once considered disparate.

2.2. World Cultural Value Conflict and Big Tech

At the core of the Big Tech problem is an issue of value conflict. On one hand, Google offers accessibility and ease of use through its services. Software that grows and molds itself around your preferences, habits and inclinations creates a personalized experience that attracts users. Google’s products appear to gift-wrap a unique user

experience for its many consumers. On the other hand, the amount of user data gathered to create this feel of accessibility can be disconcerting to consumers. This concern is amplified by the possibility that Google is using their pole position to prevent those same users from accessing the best possible options through anticompetitive practices.

The phenomenon of conflicting values is also central to World Society theory. These internal conflicts are discussed in *World Society and the Nation-state* by John Meyer et. al (1997). The article posits that "world culture contains a good many variants of the dominant models, which leads to the eclectic adoption of conflicting principles" (pp. 154). Moreover, Meyer et. al assert that "internal contradictions and inconsistencies in world-cultural models make certain forms of struggle inevitable in world society. Taken together, these factors generate widespread conflict, mobilization, and change" (pp. 168-169). In its emphasis on global models and discussing their diffusion throughout world society however, there exists a gap in the literature: how do these conflicts come about? And how do they influence the legitimacy of the actors embroiled in these conflicts? I aim to address this gap by extrapolating upon an example of the concept of conflicting ideals, which has thus far been addressed in World Society literature, but not studied empirically.

Meyer discusses the "legitimated inconsistencies" inherent in world society. He describes organizations as "dramatically interpenetrated, with endless inconsistencies between, for example, professional and organizational obligations." Furthermore, Meyer highlights "the dramatic inconsistencies between actor powers and rights, on the one hand, and practical realities on the other ... world society celebrates the equality of individuals and nations, but is extraordinarily unequal in fact – and with expanded integration, these inequalities increasingly come to be seen as inequalities." (2009, pp. 56) These ruminations reflect the tension of Google; they maintain their own conflicting professional (commercial) goals and organizational (social) obligations.

The inequalities Meyer discusses reflect the perceived ability for other corporations to compete with Google, only for them to be curbed by Google's alleged anticompetitive efforts. In an American society that boasts a capitalist culture of innovation, critics of large entities like Google would argue that competition is suppressed by established gatekeepers and the giants of Big Tech.

In an explanation of modern actorhood, Meyer asserts that "modern culture depicts society as made up of "actors" – individuals and nation-states, together with the organizations derived from them." Here, the modern actor is a "historical and ongoing cultural construction" (2009, pp. 111-112). Meyer expounds on the structure of the modern actor:

"The tension between principal and agent within the actor – between legitimated self and agency for this self – generates consequential inconsistencies and contradictions (as in any principal-agent relationship), and occasions ongoing cultural evolution. Many of the deepest contradictions of "interest" faced by modern actors are those between the interests of the underlying self and those of highly standardized and enacted agency. The underlying self has goals to pursue or interests to protect; the agent is charged to manage this interestedness effectively, but in tune with general principles and truths." (2009, pp.123-124)

Meyer refers to tensions, inconsistencies, and contradictions which pit the interests of the actor against established and standardized norms. These norms are baked into the role of agency; the agentic body must adhere to these norms, or at least concede to their importance, despite their individualized interests. Norms are implicitly agreed upon and

externally performed within a community of agents, but interests are internal, individualized, and at odds with these norms. This is the essential idea of norm conflict in world culture theory.

In his writings about human rights and individual personhood, however, Meyer does not address the potential personal infringements of an organizational actor like Google, as an actor with Google's capacity and function was unprecedented at the time of his writing. Meyer does, however, acknowledge the autonomy that global companies possess; he states, "multinational companies number in the tens of thousands; truly global companies (having global reach and not identifying themselves with any particular country or locale) number in the few thousands at most ... Global companies have enormous resources and considerable autonomy from states." (Gabel & Bruner 2003, as cited in Lechner & Boli, 2005, pp. 122)

At the outset, world culture theory tended to favor INGOs and NGOs in their research, while multinational companies are not as scrutinized; however, as Lechner and Boli state, "the explosion of global companies after the Second World War parallels, and even outstrips, that of INGOs" (2005, pp. 134). In earlier literature, world culture theorists have "seen global (multinational) companies as less important to world-cultural development than IGOs." The authors concede that "the historical sequence suggests that the internationalization of capitalism helped prepare the ground for world-cultural organizations while also generating new and greater resources that made this ground a fertile field for world-cultural interaction." Indeed, multinational companies have come to constitute a substantial swath of global-cultural communication. Though situated in a domestic setting, the case of Google, operating as a transnational entity, is an exemplar of this ripe phenomenon.

Over time, world culture theorists would come to witness an institutional “turn” in the framework of world society. This “new” institutionalism looks broadly at organizations—including multinational corporations like Google—as vehicles of world culture, enacting widespread norms and models within their structure. New institutionalist scholars specifically acknowledge the adoption of normative ideals and policies that have little to do with the practical operations of a complex organization. According to this iteration of world culture theory, complex organizations like Google are shaped by world cultural norms, regardless of Google’s actual practices and interests. These same purportedly norms mold all of the Big Tech entities, as well as non-Big Tech entities. These norm-abiding behaviors further underscore the implicit norm conflict that underlies world society theory.

In their article about organizations within the same fields becoming more similar, DiMaggio and Powell suggest a conceptualization of competitive and institutional isomorphism wherein organizations morph themselves in accord with external pressures and competing organizations in their space. Such pressures contribute to the theorized norm conflicts applied to Google; it is commonplace for corporations to work to appear rational and in line with predefined organizational standards.

Once boasting the controversial slogan “Don’t Be Evil,” Google is now seen as the ‘bad guy’ in the eyes of national governments. Where Google began as an effort to make the internet more open and accessible, critics of the company claim that its grip on the internet stifles competition from would-be competitors, causing critics to decry it as a gatekeeper of the World Wide Web. How Google exists and continues to thrive in contradiction of its own mission is the subject of inquiry in my research.

2.3. Corporate Social Responsibility

A specific line of inquiry regarding norm conflict as it pertains to corporations centers on corporate social responsibility, also known as “CSR.” In essence, corporate social responsibility is a phenomenon wherein companies assume the duty—or, *responsibility*—to address prevailing social issues and take accountability and agency in their own business practices. The existence of CSR implies that business practices are inherently unethical or at least, non-ethical. As entities which are primarily concerned with driving revenue and rewarding shareholders, Lin & Tsutsui (2012) astutely pose the question of why corporations would bend to assuage ethical concerns when they come without the promise of any tangible benefits. They found, naturally, that there must be a broader force that coaxes corporations into carrying the torch of CSR. In this case, INGOs that promote issues such as human rights and environmental protection push domestic actors to implement global CSR frameworks that reflect these ideals. This broader force alludes to the influences of world culture.

Lin & Tsutsui also scrutinize the performance of CSR: that being the difference between an articulated (ceremonial) commitment and an actualized (substantial) commitment to adhering to CSR frameworks. These scholars went on to find that cultural pressure from INGOs contributed greatly to the adoption of CSR principles, but developing countries were more likely to actualize them than developing countries. Their findings suggest that norm conflict is tied strongly to world culture, and furthermore that corporations are likely to adopt CSR principles on the surface without enacting them substantially.

In order to study the norm conflict embedded in Google’s business practices, which come to the surface amidst its antitrust lawsuits, one must acknowledge the world cultural

context created by corporate social responsibility. Despite the presence of decoupling, wherein corporations neglect to “walk the walk” regarding their ethical alignments, the ostentatious adherence demonstrates the power held by INGOs and the world cultural mandates they diffuse throughout world society.

2.4. The Historical Trajectory of CSR

Banarjee (2008) chronicles the historical evolution of corporations and their roles in ensuring social responsibility through their business practices from 19th century America to the modern companies we see today. Originally, corporations required a government charter to become “incorporated,” and in return, corporations were mandated to employ their chartered designation to serve the public good. For example, if a company was established to maintain the condition of public roads and failed to do so, their charter could be revoked. This relationship established the early dynamic between corporations and society: corporations existed and operated solely to serve the public good, rather than their own profits and self-interests.

Then came a “legal revolution” that paved the way for the corporations we know of today (Perrow, 2002). By the end of the 19th century, the regulations that kept corporations in check had dissolved. In the 1819 Supreme Court case of *Dartmouth College v. Woodward*, lawyers for Dartmouth College argued that corporations should be protected from the fluctuating interests of an ever-changing government that is privy to shift back-and-forth between political party control. The judge ruled in favor of this argument, which would establish corporations as “artificial beings” with private rights and responsibilities independent of its governing officers (Marshall, 1819).

As a result, corporations were no longer compelled to serve the public interest, and free to prioritize their own interests. In creating fictitious legal personhood for corporations, a new standard is set: corporations received individual rights and were relieved from government oversight, free to do business as they please. Despite consumer and environmental activists advocating for the government to rein in these renegade corporations, the corporations had effectively shed the element of government oversight, becoming entities all on their own. (Banarjee, 2008)

Once integral to the identity of a corporation, social responsibility becomes relegated to an external status. No longer a prerogative of the corporate entity, which enjoyed new private privileges, the phenomenon of social responsibility took on new forms. Emerging from this phenomenon is a dynamic between “shareholders” and “external stakeholders” (Banarjee, 2008). The shareholders in this scenario are those who are positioned to benefit from the emancipation of corporate interests, while external stakeholders like consumers and environmental activists are given consideration, but not so much as to subvert the desires of the shareholders. Social responsibility remains of some import for the sake of branding, reputation and legitimacy (as they affect internal profitability), but internal profitability remains paramount.

Legitimacy, however, remains a significant factor in the scope of corporate activity. Though corporations are no longer adjoined to the hip of federal governments, the state still has power to influence and sanction corporations based on models of legitimacy. This is where the relationship between corporations and society also deepens: public opinion also holds sway over whether a business is ethical (and thus, legitimate) and can revoke its legitimacy on a societal level (Carrol, 1979).

By clarifying the historical context of corporate social responsibility, the stage can be set for the contemporary case of Google, which defies the early conception of a purely

public-serving corporation while toeing the line of ceremonial corporate responsibility. The phenomenon now comes full circle, as the federal government which would have the power to dissolve Google in the past, attempts to rein it in by employing the antitrust legislation of today. Furthermore, INGOs and society at-large maintain the influence to assign and remove legitimacy and authority on the basis of a corporation's social commitments; Google's dedication to ethical endeavors appears to be under social scrutiny in this case.

2.5. The Research Problem

It has been demonstrated that Google, a microcosm and exemplar of Big Tech, has both flourished commercially, while faltering culturally. This state of tension is underscored by their simultaneous, conflicting commitments to universal accessibility and individual privacy and freedoms. While the antitrust lawsuits leveled against Google show a rebuke of their alleged anticompetitive practices, their position of dominance in the industry shows no sign of letting up. World culture theory explains that such conflicts are inherent in actors, organizations, and world society as a whole. However, there lacks a comprehensive explanation that addresses this phenomenon. Such a gap creates an opportunity to identify and investigate a bona fide example of this concept. This thesis investigates how world-cultural norms and values and their mutual conflicts become visible in the processes in which modern organizations build (and lose) their authority.

Antitrust law is how the federal government prevents companies from becoming "too big," and leveraging their foothold in any given market to push out competitors and as a result, remove options and potential bargains from consumers. In the case of antitrust law, "trusts" are anticompetitive deals formed between corporations to dominate a particular market and stifle competitors. What is patently "anticompetitive" rather than

just businesses doing business things is usually up for interpretation and situated based on the business in question. Antitrust law has been successful on a case-by-case basis and undertaking Google will serve as the biggest test of its efficacy to-date.

World culture theory subverts the bygone realist perspectives of power and authority, introducing the concept of a world polity and world society. It is through world society that norms are diffused and inherited, creating a shared conceptualization of the world's processes and structures. As world culture expands through models and global actors, society adjusts to incorporate its various elements. World cultural scholars agree on the existence of norm conflicts in society, but as previously stated, there is a lack of study of these conflicts as a standalone phenomenon. This research attempts to step in and fill that gap.

Corporate social responsibility comes with the implication that business practices are at best, non-ethical, and at worst, unethical. The application of CSR frameworks gives corporations the opportunity to gain legitimacy by aligning themselves with INGOs and society, both of which exert pressure on corporations to adopt stances on human rights, the environment, and other social issues like race and gender equality.

The historical trajectory of corporate social responsibility informs this study as it gives context to Google as a modern corporation. Whereas before a corporation like Google would be inherently beholden to federal oversight and societal good, it is not necessitated in this day and age. Moreover, it is apparent that modern corporations can employ ceremonial commitments to social responsibility, by establishing codes of conduct and aligning themselves with INGOs and influential actors who advocate for social issues. It would appear that Google maintains its legitimacy so long as it successfully performs the role of a socially-conscious entity that is not entirely concerned with self-interest.

However, the emergence of antitrust lawsuits from the federal government calls this into

question, and the public discourse is the battleground on which Google's legitimacy is debated.

3. Data and Methods

3.1. Framing Theory

In my attempt to analyze the way in which corporations like Google build and lose their authority, I will apply framing theory to the discourse surrounding Google amidst the filing of the ongoing antitrust lawsuits.

In 1993, Robert Entman attempted to marry the “scattered conceptualization” of framing into a singular, unified theory. In doing so, Entman laid the foundational groundwork for what is now known as framing theory. According to this theory, frames are the vehicle for understanding communication, injecting significance, symbolism and the “so what?” into speeches, texts, and all other means of relaying messages. Before this protracted explanation, the concept of frames was defined—and used—casually. Now that framing theory is a well-defined and replicable way of studying communications, it is a powerful tool for identifying the performance of norms and ideals through narrative frames.

The key aspects of framing theory are selection and salience. Utilized in tandem, selection and salience give frames the power to highlight and emphasize certain elements of a story among others, giving it extra meaning and centering the entire story on the selected aspect. The network of framing displays a dynamic between communicator and receiver; communicators create the frames and receivers consume them. Essentially, framing is a way for communicators to engage the perspective of receivers, who may differ and diverge in their viewpoints, and influence them to *converge* on one decided interpretation, or rather, frame.

Frames answer four questions in their evocation. The first being, “*what is the problem?*” Indeed, frames carry with them a problem definition, meaning they delineate

the issue at hand. A report on the economy may frame the problem as there being too few jobs, or too high taxes. Framing allows one to pick the particular and place it, above all others, under proper scrutiny. The second question answered by frames is “*what or who is the cause?*” This question gives the frame the power of causal interpretation, essentially assigning blame to an actor or phenomenon as the source of the pre-established problem. Then, frames evaluate issues from a moral standpoint, telling or receiver *what is right, and what is wrong*. Through moral evaluation, the communicator takes a normative stance on the alleged origin of the stated problem. Finally, frames answer the question of “*what do we do about this?*” by suggesting remedies and proposing a resolution to the original problem. Altogether, frames give communicators the capacity to tell a complete and convincing story to receivers by presenting a problem, its cause, its moral significance, and eventually, the remedy. (Entman, 1993)

By employing framing theory as a research paradigm, researchers must assent to its theoretical implications as well. Firstly, that frames presented in media are alluding to a dominant narrative, and it is not taken for granted that receivers will challenge these interpretations to inject nuance into the discussion. Additionally, it is not taken for granted that journalists are purely objective, whether or not they are transparent in their subjectivity. Framing requires the emphasis on some elements and the omission of others; this means that the perspective will be unavoidably skewed regardless of the professionalism of the communicator. Framing theory also relies on a stratified system of content analysis, which requires a discriminating study of which ideas are made salient for the receivers. Moreover, researchers applying framing theory must acknowledge that the practice of framing is deeply political, in that it is utilized by politicians themselves. Framing implies that concepts and issues are so malleable that there is no use in trying to

arrive at the best or truest conclusion, even if we can pinpoint the most widely accepted reality. (Entman, 1993)

In the case of Google and its pending federal antitrust lawsuits, framing theory can reveal much about the world cultural norm conflicts in play and how Google endeavors to remain a model business and model world cultural actor despite their ongoing judicial scrutiny. Through framing, communicators interested in the antitrust cases are able to take the existing world cultural norms and apply them for or against Google as a way to vindicate or villainize them. Therefore, framing theory helps us understand this phenomenon by demonstrating the key frames within the discourse as dictated by world cultural norms. The conflicts in question will play out via the dialogue surrounding Google Inc., and by extension, Big Tech in general.

By using framing theory, I will be able to identify and extract the core conflicts in Google's corporate operations by identifying the main points of contention (i.e. what do Google's detractors say about them? What is the response of Google and their supporters?). Frames are powerful tools that give meaning and significance to our immediate realities, tying objective occurrences to a singular concept or narrative. Because antitrust rulings are largely up for interpretation, the social dialogue surrounding Google will be indicative of the legislative discourse that follows. Thus, these questions will be posed to the data: what are the distinct frames? What are the ontological claims? What are the remedies put forward? Framing theory as a method allows the research to answer these inquiries.

3.2. Data

This study uses published journalistic articles, statements from federal legislators, and statements from Google spanning from October 6, 2020 to December 29, 2020. This timeframe was chosen because it captures the media covering Google two weeks prior and eight weeks following the filing of the first antitrust lawsuit by the Department of Justice. Capturing the two weeks leading up to the landmark lawsuit is important to the data; in early October, the United States Congress' Antitrust Subcommittee divulged a 450-page report detailing their investigations against Big Tech, hinting at the pursuit of further legal action. This is where the discourse begins. Over the course of this ten-week timespan, discourse surrounding Google and its practices erupts in the media, as additional lawsuits crop up on December 16 and 17. Covering the lead-up and immediate fallout of the antitrust case filings allows the research to pinpoint which themes emerge once the news is fresh, relevant, and a hotly debated topic. Indeed, the media discourse sets the stage for the case itself, making it a strong point of observation in regard to the arguments that are integral to the issue.

As previously stated, the body of data will consist mainly of newspaper articles and include official statements from the United States Department of Justice and Google's official corporate blog. The articles will come from the following sources: Washington Post (5 articles), The Guardian (3 articles), New York Times (2 articles), Bloomberg, Wall Street Journal (7 articles), Business Insider, WIRED, Fortune and POLITICO. These outlets were chosen based on having acceptable reputations for quality and reliable journalism, accessibility and availability to the public, and popularity on the basis of being mainstream and widely read. These sources are largely domestic in nature, and though more international sources would be welcome, the cases are so situated in the United States that trying to find additional sources outside of America is not necessary. However, this study

maintains that the case of Google is an issue that is global in nature, given the scope of Google as a multinational company that has faced scrutiny from governing bodies outside of the U.S. as well. The command that Google has on the U.S. market is mirrored in its various other operating territories; therefore the findings of this research may very well be indicative of what one would find in a global setting.

The inclusion of Google's corporate blog contributes to the breadth of opinions and frames included in the research. The body of data features four of these entries. Moreover, the inclusion of press releases from the United States Department of Justice offers an alternative perspective on the frames presented in this case. The research features two of such press releases.

Per the stated purpose of the research, the body of 28 media articles from 11 sources spanning 10 weeks will be analyzed to inform the frames embedded in the discourse surrounding Google and the antitrust lawsuits filed against Google. Specifically, the research aims to identify and classify these frames as evidence of how world cultural norm conflicts emerge in the case of Google. This will be accomplished by quantitative text coding and qualitative close reading analysis of the selected articles to observe which frames are encountered and the frequency in which they occur. This will be executed by focusing on how the media depicts Google's operations; opposing frames will be compared and contrasted to demonstrate the presence of norm conflicts.

4. Analysis

In conducting thematic analysis of the 28 articles from 11 sources over the span of 12 weeks, this research was able to pinpoint the following frames and their diverging representations in the media: Google as a fair (or unfair) competitor, Google as helping (or harming) consumers, and the efficacy (or inefficacy) of antitrust law. These are the most frequently occurring, and highly contested frames in the discourse surrounding Google as the details of the antitrust cases unfold. In the next section, I will expand on these frames.

4.1. Frame: Google as a Fair Competitor

Whether Google operates as a “fair” competitor in the markets it occupies is one such area of contention, and an issue that is front-and-center in the deliberation of the federal antitrust cases. The selected media outlets, federal government, and Google itself contributed to this discourse by highlighting certain aspects of the dialogue and omitting others. Through selection and salience, the ensuing frame emerged.

According to the media debate, Google is not merely successful because of the quality of its product, but aggressive in using its pole position in the market to subdue any possible opponent before they have a chance to compete. Depictions of Google as an unfair competitor in the media closely mirror the assertions put forward by the federal government, as evidenced in this excerpt from *WIRED*:

“According to several studies, Google controls upwards of 90 percent of multiple parts of the digital advertising supply chain. Whenever you open a website (or an app) and see an ad, chances are the advertiser used Google to buy the ad placement; the publisher used Google to make the ad space available; and the two

parties made the deal in an automated auction on Google's advertising exchange. This setup, where one company represents both the buyer and seller while running the marketplace itself, creates obvious conflicts of interest. According to the states' complaint, Google exploits its control over the advertising pipeline to impose unfair conditions on advertisers and publishers, discriminate against rival ad tech firms, and rake in a bigger cut of online ad spending than it would earn if there were more middlemen competing for the business." (Edelman, 2020)

This quote exemplifies the problem definition of this frame: that Google leverages its ubiquity as a search engine to bolster their own ad sales and control multiple aspects of the online ad marketplace. Following the problem definition, frames must also carry a causal diagnosis. In this case, the media discourse highlights deals made between Google and Big Tech counterpart, Apple, as an example of how Google squeezes the market and deprives competitors of the opportunity to grow:

"Google gained its 'grip on distribution,' the Justice Department said, by paying billions of dollars to become the default search application in Web browsers, on smartphones and across a wide array of other devices and services, including those offered by some of its competitors, such as Apple. This vast, unparalleled reach allowed Google to enrich itself through lucrative ads, maintain its online foothold and render it impossible for other search engines to compete, the federal lawsuit alleges." (Romm, 2020)

The above quote from *The Washington Post* demonstrates the media's choice to give salience to the federal allegations, even if not explicitly taking a "side" in the issue. In the discourse regarding Google's reputation as a fair or unfair competitor, narratives of backdoor business dealings appear to take center stage. In terms of moral evaluation, the media characterizes Google as being financially driven above all:

"Congress said Google's practice is dangerous, writing on page 188 of its report that it has "the effect of privileging Google's own inferior services while demoting competitors' offerings." There are times I find a Google Map or YouTube video at the top of a search to be helpful. The problem is, Google also has a financial motivation to keep us from clicking away to other sources ... Google makes five times as much revenue from ads on its own properties as it does on ads it places elsewhere." (Fowler, 2020)

The author of this *Washington Post* piece acknowledges the utility and ease of Google's products and interface, but ultimately assigns "financial motivation" as its guiding light, implying greed and attributing a negative moral evaluation to the company. There must then, be a suggested solution for the problem of this frame. The following quotes show where the media has found the recommended remedy:

"Simply by bringing these cases, the government will temporarily restrain the predatory instincts of Facebook and Google, which will be on their best behavior for the next five to eight years as the cases wind their way through the federal court system." (Pearlstein, 2020)

“The states are requesting action be taken to prevent Google from continuing these anticompetitive practices, including potentially breaking up the company.” (Paul, 2020)

Based on these quotes from *The Washington Post* and *The Guardian*, the solution put forth is twofold: curbing the “predatory” practices of Google in the short-term and installing structural reform to prevent them from happening long-term, whether that comes in the form of legislation or mandating a breakup of Google.

The discourse highlighted by this frame brings to the surface the conflicts inherent in Google being a fair or unfair competitor. Frameworks of corporate social responsibility encourage civic responsibility from companies, while also ensuring the same companies maintain agency in pursuing fiscal goals and profits. Google’s prerogative as a business is to drive profits, but world cultural norms implore it to be conscientious. Meanwhile antitrust laws and precedents also exert pressure on Google to not become “too big,” or else it risks being punished and broken up. Based on these, it would appear Google is pulled in different directions as it attempts to exemplify the role of a rational, responsible, successful world cultural actor. In an effort to maintain legitimacy on the world cultural stage, Google has denied the allegations of the federal cases, and already began shoring up their defense against these claims.

“The company maintains that its purchase of default space on mobile devices is no different from a consumer brand buying preferable shelf space in a grocery store.

It also argues that it is easy for Apple and Android smartphone users to switch from its search service to that of a competitor.” (McCabe, 2020)

“The company’s major rivals in digital ads, Facebook, Amazon, and Apple, continue to grow their ad businesses—a sign Google isn’t shutting out competitors. Meanwhile marketers can also use smaller digital services like Pinterest, Autotrader, and TripAdvisor, Google said, though they’ll likely get much smaller returns on their spending than on Google.” (Abril, 2020)

These quotes from *New York Times* and *Fortune* are examples of Google’s response to accusations of being an unfair competitor. They claim that they actually embrace having competition, and that the deals they have with other Big Tech companies are a common practice for anyone in their space. Even in their defense, Google attempts to hold the balance between the conceptions of being a fierce and fair competitor: pushing for primacy without pushing out their peers. Google asserts that there is plenty of competition, and that they are merely a business doing business things, meaning their dominance has more to do with user demand than eliminating competition. The next frame engages the topic of Google as it relates to consumers, and not competition.

4.2. Frame: Google as Helping Consumers

Related to the question of Google’s willingness to compete fairly is whether Google is simply the best option for its consumers. This press release from the Office of Public Affairs of The U.S Department of Justice well captures the problem definition:

“The Complaint alleges that Google’s anticompetitive practices have had harmful effects on competition and consumers. Google has foreclosed any meaningful search competitor from gaining vital distribution and scale, eliminating competition for a majority of search queries in the United States. By restricting competition in search, Google’s conduct has harmed consumers by reducing the quality of search (including on dimensions such as privacy, data protection, and use of consumer data), lessening choice in search, and impeding innovation. By suppressing competition in advertising, Google has the power to charge advertisers more than it could in a competitive market and to reduce the quality of the services it provides them.” (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs, 2020)

This characterization puts forth the idea that consumers are being hurt by Google in ways they may not be aware of, because the lack of competition prevents consumers from knowing what they are missing out on. Continuing the theme of Google being involved in multiple spheres of the market, the U.S. Department of Justice refers to “users,” and “advertisers” as Google’s consumers. While Google search is free, the web advertising arm of Google’s business is a major source of revenue. Moreover, referencing “reduced quality” in privacy and data protection implies that though Google Search is free, the media believes that it harms consumers by using their private information in nefarious ways.

If the “problem” in this frame is that Google harms consumers without them even knowing due to their control of search and advertising, then there must be a causal interpretation in the media.

“Google started as a simple search engine ... but over time it has developed into a far broader conglomerate. Its flagship search engine handles more than 90% of global search requests, some billions a day, providing fodder for what has become a vast brokerage of digital advertising. Its YouTube unit is the world’s largest video platform, used by nearly three-quarters of U.S. adults.” (Kendall & Copeland, 2020)

“The House probe determined that the tech giant had tapped vast swaths of user data to become "an ecosystem of interlocking monopolies" in search, advertising, mapping, mobile and more. Lawmakers homed in on the ways that Google gives its own products a boost in search results, even when they are inferior to competitors...” (Romm et al., 2020)

“Google’s ability to push its own products has quietly reshaped swaths of the economy ... Since launching Google Flights and Google Hotels nearly a decade ago, Google has come to command the online travel market. Never mind that Google’s travel search, like its listings for pediatricians, isn’t considered tops: It didn’t even make Frommer’s 2020 list of the best airfare search sites.” (Fowler, 2020)

These quotes from *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post* reflect the media’s conception of how Google is able to reach so many consumers while, purportedly, not providing the best possible products. From coming onto the scene as a “simple search engine” and steadily spreading into markets such as digital advertising and online travel,

the media explains that Google has become indispensable to its consumers, even as it offers inferior services to them.

“Search and advertising are not mere products like cars or refrigerators; search and advertising represent the flow of information in a free society. America, and the world, has never seen this kind of radical centralization of information flow and ad financing.” (Miller, 2020)

“How does Google’s alleged monopoly hurt you? Today, 88 percent of all searches happen on Google, in part because contracts make it the default on computers and phones. But whether Google is actually fetching you good information can be hard to see. First, Googling is easy and free, which blinds everyone a bit. Second, we don’t have a great alternative for broad Web searches — Microsoft’s rival Bing doesn’t have enough data to compete well. (This is the problem of monopolies in the information age.)” (Fowler, 2020)

Here, the media discusses the unique situation of Google and its products: that they are not like “cars” or “refrigerators” but hold a more important metaphysical meaning through its search and advertising. By gaining such a foothold in the aspects of the Internet that give consumers insight to the world around them, Google has “blinded” its consumers into accepting lesser versions of the services they desire. In doing this, the media puts forward a moral evaluation that consumers are being deprived of such services, and that Google is responsible for this deprivation.

“Because Google Search is free, the government can’t claim that consumers must pay higher prices owing to Google’s deals. So instead, the DOJ suggested that consumers were worse off because of Google’s dominance, which hampered companies from creating even better services and kept smaller players out of the market.” (Abril, 2020)

“The Department will continue to vigorously investigate and enforce the antitrust laws where appropriate to protect and promote competition in the digital economy for the benefit of the American consumer.” (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, 2020)

Coming from *Fortune* and a press release from the *U.S. Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General*, these quotes characterize the solutions put forth within the media debate. Though Google’s search tools are free, using the antitrust case proceeding as an opportunity to demonstrate that consumers are missing out on better services is the optimal way to convince the courts that Google needs to be reined in, per the media discourse.

The arguments of each side depend on whether Google is the top choice despite a wide field of options or the top choice due to a dearth of alternatives. If it is true that Google is merely the most preferred option by a large margin, and their equivalently large market share is because of that, then the antitrust lawsuits may prove moot; however, if the federal government can demonstrate that Google has forced itself into a position where it is the only feasible option, thus removing other, better options from the equation, then

there is a merit to their antitrust claims. Critics of Google will also take the position that Google's dominance stymies innovation and prevents consumers from finding better, more cost-effective options. Google's own defense is that it is the best option among many options, as evidenced by their blog articles:

“When you search for local products and services, we show information that helps you connect with businesses directly and helps them reach more customers. This lawsuit demands changes to the design of Google Search, requiring us to prominently feature online middlemen in place of direct connections to businesses.” (Cohen, 2020)

“This lawsuit claims that Americans aren't sophisticated enough to do this. But we know that's not true. And you know it too: people downloaded a record 204 billion apps in 2019. Many of the world's most popular apps aren't preloaded—think of Spotify, Instagram, Snapchat, Amazon and Facebook.” (Walker, 2020)

Written by executive officers at Google, these blog posts attempt to rebut, and reframe, the media narratives surrounding Google and its relationship with consumers. Where media frames assert that Google creates an advertising loop to redirect customers to their own sites and services, Google frames it as cutting out “middlemen.” Furthermore, Google claims that if consumers do not like their services, they can easily opt-out, and download other apps to replace their ecosystem. To remain legitimate actors in world culture, Google is compelled to convey that consumer experiences and social benefits are their main concern, though media narratives imply the opposite.

4.3. Frame: The Efficacy of Antitrust Law

Another important element to these cases and how it impacts Google on the world cultural stage is the lasting efficacy of antitrust law. According to the media discourse, the fate of Google's recent antitrust scrutiny and the power of antitrust governance are inextricably linked.

“First and foremost, these cases represent a recognition that regulators and judges were asleep at the switch over the past two decades and failed to prevent monopolization in the economy’s fastest-growing sector and a linchpin of American competitiveness.” (Pearlstein, 2020)

The problem is defined within the media as a failure of antitrust legislators to prevent Google from operating unchecked for an extended period of time. According to this quote from *The Washington Post*, the discourse says that federal intervention is largely overdue and risks being ineffective based on the lax precedence that paved the way for the current situation.

“The Sherman Act, which prohibits restraints of trade and attempted monopolization, is broadly worded, leaving courts wide latitude to interpret its parameters. Because litigated antitrust cases are rare, any one ruling could affect governing precedent for future cases. The tech sector has been a particular challenge for antitrust enforcers and the courts because the industry evolves so rapidly. Also, many products and services are offered free to consumers, who in a

sense pay with the valuable personal data companies such as Google collect.”

(Kendall & Copeland, 2020)

The causal interpretation presented by the media is as such: The Sherman Act, a major tenet of antitrust law, is “broadly worded,” and evoked so rarely and sporadically that its effectiveness when applied to the case of Google is in question. As evidenced by the above quote from *The Wall Street Journal*, antitrust rulings set the precedent for future cases, and a faltering verdict in the case of Google may spell out negative consequences for the efficacy of antitrust law.

“The Google case is a good start, but we haven’t really enforced anti-monopoly laws for 20 years, so search distribution isn’t the only problematic area. Google has market power elsewhere, including the software underpinning online publishing and advertising. It is starving newspapers and publishers and killing rivals like Yelp and TripAdvisor. Fortunately, state attorneys general are likely to bring cases against other aspects of the company’s business. More fundamentally, this case is bigger than just one market or one company; it’s about protecting democracy itself against concentrated private power. As Cicilline put it a few months ago: “Our founders would not bow before a king. Nor should we bow before the emperors of the online economy.” (Miller, 2020)

The media represents the Google case as an opportunity for the government to step up and use antitrust laws the way they were intended: to “protect democracy” from the “emperors of the online economy. Such language is strong and carries a moral evaluation that the

government must fight Google for justice. The government, which is rarely seen as the “little guy” in legal battles is juxtaposed with a considerable opponent in Google. This excerpt from *The Guardian* injects moral implications and high stakes into the applicability of antitrust laws.

“The key distinction to keep in mind is between being competitive and being anti-competitive ... Being anti-competitive means using your power in a market to exclude potential rivals so that you don’t have to try as hard to be the best. The common thread in all three lawsuits is the accusation that Google has engaged in anti-competitive conduct designed to entrench its monopoly position, instead of purely trying to win on the merits.” (Edelman, 2020)

“If the government wins out over Google, the company could be forced to restructure or possibly separate parts of its business,” Business Insider’s Isobel Asher Hamilton and Aaron Holmes report. “If Google wins, the case could set a precedent shielding several tech giants from legal scrutiny they’re currently facing — but lawmakers could still aim to regulate or break up tech companies through new laws.” (Taylor, 2020)

The prescribed solution put forth by the discourse is that antitrust legislators must ensure that the claims made actually stick to Google and spur change, either through restructuring or new regulations. To do that, according to quotes from *WIRED* and *Business Insider*, the courts must decide that Google has engaged in textbook examples of anticompetitive behavior.

Despite the scrutiny from the federal government, Google responds by voicing its support for antitrust laws:

“We understand that with our success comes scrutiny, but we stand by our position. American antitrust law is designed to promote innovation and help consumers, not tilt the playing field in favor of particular competitors or make it harder for people to get the services they want. We’re confident that a court will conclude that this suit doesn’t square with either the facts or the law.” (Walker, 2020)

“American antitrust law’s focus on helping consumers has been a key driver of innovation in the U.S. economy. Antitrust helps consumers by promoting competition, which helps keep prices low and product quality high. We operate across many highly competitive sectors where prices are free or falling and products are constantly improving.” (Google, 2020)

In doing so, Google positions itself once again as a rational actor and legitimate civic participant in world society. Though Google would not benefit from any antitrust action, throwing their support behind antitrust laws in the interest of consumer protection affords them greater legitimacy and authority. While coming out as a proponent of antitrust legislation, Google also decries the lawsuits levelled against it as illegitimate, slightly modifying the message so that Google maintains legitimacy without giving credence to the lawsuits filed against it.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The research is a revelatory practice in understanding what media discourses and framing can illustrate about world cultural norm conflicts. The case of Google has been an especially edifying context to explore this phenomenon. Google is situated as a singular unique case of a multinational corporation that is so public-facing that it seeks to maintain its legitimacy and authority on the world cultural stage. Google also functions as a microcosm of Big Tech, as its scrutiny mirrors the widespread scrutiny of Big Tech corporations and culture in the modern age.

World culture theory scholars have established that norms spread and diffuse through organizations in transnational contexts. For Google, pressures to be a rational actor are exerted by social justice advocates and INGOs, and Google acquiesces as a rational actor is expected to. The framework of corporate social responsibility implores that Google and other Big Tech corporations consider subscribing to endeavors of social good, whether they materialize or remain ceremonial. Demonstrating a vested interest in the social good does nothing to further line Google's pockets, but is a necessary performance in the world cultural landscape of today.

The debate on whether Google is a fair competitor is the centerpiece of the Department of Justice's antitrust lawsuit; it also happens to be the centerpiece of Google's media coverage during the fallout of the lawsuit filings. The media coverage appears to sway against Google in this regard, at least in the sense that it believes it has an unfair advantage over its competitors. The crux of the issue, however, relies on the federal prosecutors to prove that Google holds this advantage illegally. This will be one test of antitrust laws; it is one thing to say that Google is *wrong*, it is another to say that Google is *guilty*.

The media discourse regarding Google's relationship to its consumers is equally contentious. Google asserts that if consumers do not like its services, they can go elsewhere, whether that means searching through Bing, booking trips through TripAdvisor, and even buying ad space through other avenues. The problem is, as media outlets have pointed out, the Google ecosystem is a bit more encompassing than what Google has represented it as. Furthermore, when certain applications are pre-installed and undeletable on certain devices, opting out does not feel like much of an option. Is it true that Google is "number one" because it is the best? Or has it truly deprived consumers of alternatives through its aggressive business practices?

This antitrust case places Google at odds with the world cultural norms it has adopted to keep its status as a major player on the world cultural stage. Defying antitrust mandates and going head-to-head with the governments of the world has put it in a precarious situation, but also opens opportunities for it to establish even more of a foothold. If Google can shed this lawsuit by being found not guilty of wrongdoing, the tensions of world cultural norm conflict will temporarily subside, but antitrust legislation in the United States may never recover. The problem is that antitrust law has been too elastic to be effectively and consistently enforced. Antitrust legislators and proponents are rightly saying that it needs to be changed to adapt to today's scaled up "winner-take-all" era of Big Tech. The case itself is a major test of the lasting efficacy of antitrust law, a last-ditch effort to rein in the freewheeling business practices of Big Tech firms. If this case fails, future attempts to curb perceived anticompetitive practices will as well. This is the great white whale of antitrust cases.

Future research may seek to understand how norm conflicts manifest with the other giants of Big Tech, as well as large pharmaceutical, defense and other corporations operating in lucrative markets. For the sake of longitudinal viability, further research can

be done on Google after the verdicts of the antitrust cases are handed down, probably years in the future. It would be interesting to see if Google still adheres to world cultural norms, and how norm conflicts manifest in world culture post-antitrust cases. Perhaps Google is the first exemplar of a “new normal” when it comes to modern corporations, and these antitrust corporations are a reaction to the change. Finally, it would be valuable to observe whether antitrust enforcement has any veracity in the future, since the current cases carry implications for the future of anticompetitive legislative efforts.

Bibliography

- Abril, D. (2020). *Google says it isn't a dangerous monopoly. Here are its 4 key arguments*. Fortune. Retrieved 26 April 2021, from <https://fortune.com/2020/10/20/google-antitrust-lawsuit-monopoly-defense-arguments/>.
- Attorney General of Texas. (2020, Dec 16). AG Paxton Leads Multistate Coalition in Lawsuit Against Google for Anticompetitive Practices and Deceptive Misrepresentations [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/news/releases/ag-paxton-leads-multistate-coalition-lawsuit-against-google-anticompetitive-practices-and-deceptive>
- Banerjee, S. B. (2008). Corporate Social Responsibility: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly. *Critical Sociology*, 34(1), 51–79. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920507084623>
- Berger, M. (2011). The Freedom of Information Act: implications for public health policy and practice. *Public health reports (Washington, D.C. : 1974)*, 126(3), 428–432. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003335491112600317>
- Boli, J. (2005). Contemporary Developments in World Culture. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 46(5–6), 383–404. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020715205058627>
- Carroll, A. B. (1979). A three-dimensional conceptual model of corporate performance. *Academy of management review*, 4(4), 497-505.
- Cohen, A. (2020). *Redesigning Search would harm American consumers and businesses*.

Google. Retrieved 26 April 2021, from <https://blog.google/outreach-initiatives/public-policy/redesigning-search-would-harm-consumers-and-american-businesses/>.

Colorado Office of the Attorney General. (2020, Dec 20). Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser leads multistate lawsuit seeking to end Google's illegal monopoly in search market [Press Release]. Retrieved from <https://coag.gov/press-releases/12-17-20/>

DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (2000). The iron cage revisited institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. In *Economics meets sociology in strategic management*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Economides, N., & Lianos, I. (2009). The elusive antitrust standard on bundling in Europe and in the United States in the aftermath of the Microsoft cases. *Antitrust Law Journal*, 76(2), 483+.
<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A219309586/AONE?u=tampere&sid=AONE&xid=7b40631d>

Edelman, G. (2020). Google's Antitrust Cases: A Guide for the Perplexed. *WIRED*. Retrieved 26 April 2021, from <https://www.wired.com/story/google-antitrust-lawsuits-explainer/>.

Edelman, G. (2020). Texas Accuses Google and Facebook of an Illegal Conspiracy. *WIRED*. Retrieved 26 April 2021, from <https://www.wired.com/story/texas-accuses-google-facebook-illegal-conspiracy/>.

Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of communication*, 43(4), 51-58.

Federal Trade Commission. (2020, Dec 9). FTC Sues Facebook for Illegal Monopolization.

[Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/press-releases/2020/12/ftc-sues-facebook-illegal-monopolization>

Finnemore, M. (1993). Review: Norms, Culture, and World Politics: Insights from Sociology's Institutionalism. *International Organization Vol. 50, No. 2 (Spring, 1996)*. pp. 325-347.

Fowler, G. (2020). *How does Google's monopoly hurt you? Try these searches*. The Washington Post. Retrieved 26 April 2021, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/10/19/google-search-results-monopoly/>.

Google (2020). *Google's free products help people and small businesses across America*.

Google Blog. Retrieved 27 April 2021, from <https://blog.google/competition#overview>

Google's antitrust cases in Europe. (2018, Jul 18). *Reuters*. Retrieved from

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-google-antitrust-timeline/googles-antitrust-cases-in-europe-idUSKBN1K81CC>

Issa, D. (2015, March 18). Recording of "Fixing FOIA" panel talk at an event sponsored by

the House Transparency Caucus (Retrieved from

<https://docs.google.com/uc?id=oB5IqyJxcAxM9bW9oVHVtSoJMbok&export=download>

Kendall, B., & Copeland, R. (2020). *Justice Department Hits Google With Antitrust*

Lawsuit. The Wall Street Journal. Retrieved 26 April 2021, from

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/justice-department-to-file-long-awaited-antitrust-suit-against-google-11603195203>.

Lechner, F. J., & Boli, J. (2005). *World culture: Origins and consequences*. Malden, MA, USA: Blackwell Pub.

Lim, A., & Tsutsui, K. (2012). Globalization and Commitment in Corporate Social Responsibility: Cross-National Analyses of Institutional and Political-Economy Effects. *American Sociological Review*, 77(1), 69–98.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122411432701>

Marshall, J. (1819). Dartmouth College v. Woodward. *US Supreme Court decision*.

McCabe, D. (2020). *Google Denies Antitrust Claims in Early Response to U.S. Lawsuit*. The New York Times. Retrieved 26 April 2021, from
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/21/technology/google-antitrust-lawsuit.html>.

Meyer, J., Boli, J., Thomas, G. and Ramirez, F. (1997). World Society and the Nation-State. *American Journal of Sociology*, 103(1), pp.144-181.

Meyer, J. (2009). Reflections: Institutional Theory on World Society. In Krucken. G. & Drori, G. (Eds.), *World Society: The Writings of John W. Meyer* (pp. 36-63). Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Meyer, J. (2009). The “Actors” of Modern Society: The Cultural Construction of Social Agency. In Krucken. G. & Drori, G. (Eds.), *World Society: The Writings of John W. Meyer* (pp. 111-135). Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Miller, S. (2020). *A US antitrust suit might break up Google. Good – it's the Standard Oil of our day*. The Guardian. Retrieved 26 April 2021, from
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/oct/21/google-antitrust-monopoly-power-us-politics>.

- Paul, K. (2020). *Google is facing the biggest antitrust case in a generation. What could happen?.* The Guardian. Retrieved 26 April 2021, from <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/oct/21/google-antitrust-charges-what-is-next>.
- Paul, K. (2020). *'This is big': US lawmakers take aim at once-untouchable big tech.* The Guardian. Retrieved 26 April 2021, from <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/dec/18/google-facebook-antitrust-lawsuits-big-tech>.
- Pearlstein, S. (2020). *Facebook and Google cases are our last chance to save the economy from monopolization.* The Washington Post. Retrieved from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/12/18/google-facebook-antitrust-lawsuit/>
- Perrow, C. (2009). *Organizing America: Wealth, power, and the origins of corporate capitalism.* Princeton University Press.
- Platoff, E. (2020, Dec. 16). Texas leads lawsuit against Google, alleging anti-competitive advertising practices. *The Texas Tribune*. Retrieved from <https://www.texastribune.org/2020/12/16/texas-google-lawsuit/>
- Powell, W. W., & Bromley, P. (2015). New institutionalism in the analysis of complex organizations. *International encyclopedia of the social & behavioral sciences*, 2, 764-769.
- Rainey, T. (2019, Oct 7). Is Breaking Up Amazon, Facebook, and Google a Good Idea?. *BU Today*. Retrieved from <http://www.bu.edu/articles/2019/break-up-big-tech/>
- Romm, T., Zakrzewski, C., & Lerman, R. (2020). *House investigation faults Amazon,*

Apple, Facebook and Google for engaging in anti-competitive monopoly tactics.

The Washington Post. Retrieved 26 April 2021, from

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/10/06/amazon-apple-facebook-google-congress/>.

Romm, T. (2020). *Justice Department sues Google, alleging multiple violations of federal*

antitrust law. The Washington Post. Retrieved 26 April 2021, from

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2020/10/20/google-antitrust-doj-lawsuit/>.

Taylor, K. (2020). *Google is expected to counter the DOJ's historic antitrust lawsuit with*

claims that it's misunderstood and faces plenty of competition. Business Insider.

Retrieved 26 April 2021, from <https://www.businessinsider.com/googles-defense-in-antitrust-case-rests-on-competition-consumers-2020-10?r=US&IR=T>.

Thomas, G. M. (2009). World polity, world culture, world society. *International Political*

Sociology, 3(1), 115-119.

U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs. (2020). *Justice Department Sues*

Monopolist Google For Violating Antitrust Laws. Retrieved from

<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-sues-monopolist-google-violating-antitrust-laws>

U.S. Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General. (2020). *Statement of the*

Attorney General on the Announcement Of Civil Antitrust Lawsuit Filed Against

Google. Retrieved from <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/statement-attorney-general-announcement-civil-antitrust-lawsuit-filed-against-google>

U.S. Department of Justice. (2020, Oct 20). U.S. AND PLAINTIFF STATES V.

GOOGLE LLC [Case file]. Retrieved from <https://www.justice.gov/atr/case/us-and-plaintiff-states-v-google-llc>

Walker, K. (2020). *A deeply flawed lawsuit that would do nothing to help consumers.*

Google. Retrieved 26 April 2021, from <https://blog.google/outreach-initiatives/public-policy/response-doj>.