

## Case Study: The Online Avalanche in Ishmaelia

### Description

Ishmaelia is a developing country in East Africa, and in the past ten years its people have fallen in love with the online world; whether it is social media, search engines, or subscription television services; they cannot get enough of it. These online services are being provided mainly by a consortium of international companies, predominantly founded and based in the United States of America.

The ease of using these services and technologies has had a very detrimental impact on the country's local media, which is slowly fading away. Concurrently, much of the content that has already been created by the local media outlets has been bought up by these large organisations, and can only be accessed by subscribing to their services.

The Consortium argue that they are "*spending billions of euro in creating vital technological infrastructure that is bringing Ishmaelia into the 21st Century*". It is true that they are collectively, and individually, providing a great deal of Internet infrastructure, as well as cloud-based data centres, and specialised software. They have also been digitising archives of newspapers and indigenous film, television and radio; and are also working closely with a number of national museums and universities to digitise (and preserve) important historical and archaeological artefacts that they are making freely available to scholars. They also sponsor a number of national sports teams and individual athletes.

One of the key goals of the Consortium is to harvest the vast quantity of data that is being generated by the people of Ishmaelia when they interact with these services. This data is a very valuable commodity, and can be used by the Consortium to expand their global reach; the data can also be processed to generate further consumer services, as well as being sold onto third-party organisations for marketing purposes. Ultimately, this results in the Consortium generating a large profit, the majority of which is transferred to the United States, and does not stay in Ishmaelia.

Over the past 18 months, the government of Ishmaelia have been trying to encourage the development of indigenous technology companies by providing taxation breaks and small state grants. They have had some very minor successes with this initiative, but in general these indigenous companies are not succeeding since the Consortium won't allow them access to their Internet infrastructure, and the government of Ishmaelia cannot afford to roll out its own publicly-funded Internet infrastructure. Those few companies that have been successful have had to emulate the marketing tactics, and data collection strategies of the Consortium.

The Ishmaelian Digital Rights Activists Group (IDRAG) is a growing political body who are deeply concerned with the digital trends that are occurring in their country, where they feel their people's personal information is being exploited by outside organizations. They also feel that their people's privacy is at risk from services that collect a range of information each time a service is accessed, including: geographical information, specific device information, a record of all of the other applications the users have launched (whether these applications are Consortium-owned or not), and a record of all key-clicks and mouse-clicks done while the application is running. According to IDRAG, this is essentially "*constant, 24 hour surveillance*

*of everything you do, think, read and buy*". They also point out that the Consortium have an unfair advantage, since not only do they have their technological infrastructure already in place, but they are also collecting more and more data that allow them to create services that are increasingly attractive to consumers. IDRAG has been working with the few successful indigenous technology companies to develop alternative services using Open Source Software as foundation for development.

The Consortium is aware of the bad publicity that they are engendering (in spite of the many good works they have for this country), they have therefore decided to create a suite of educational services that they will make freely available to primary and secondary schools. This will include the development of a sophisticated virtual learning environment, as well as creating a rich collection of educational content (including free textbooks) that is localised to national needs and this will also be supplied freely. The Consortium is about to start to roll out this initiative, and is also supplying free hardware, free installation, and free support service in exchange for having full access to all the data generated by these educational systems.

## Questions

1. In this the Consortium have created the majority of Internet infrastructure in Ishmaelia, don't they have the right to refuse indigenous technology companies access to it? Why?
2. If the people of Ishmaelia are no longer supporting their own local media, should the government intervene to stop their existing media being bought up by the Consortium? Why?
3. When accessing the Consortium's services, the Terms & Conditions clearly state that all of the data generated, as well as other contextual data, is being copied to Consortium servers, what they are doing is clearly legal, but is it ethical? Why?
4. IDRAG has been working with the few successful indigenous technology companies to develop alternative services, and they call on the government to provide them with substantial funding to complete this project, if you were the official who had the decision-making power in this scenario, would you fund this initiative? Why?
5. IDRAG are arguing that the new educational services are simply a way of Ethics Washing, as well as a way of collecting more data about people (starting at a younger age), and this new service is also getting children accustomed to the Consortium's specific software so that they will be more likely to use this type of software in the future. IDRAG call on the government to stop this rollout. If you are the official in charge of making this decision, will you stop the rollout or not? Why?