

Social Media Giants Choking Independent News Site Traffic to a Trickle

Several prominent figures, including Web inventor Tim Berners-Lee, warned the EU Parliament that its proposed censorship measure would begin transforming the Internet from an open platform for sharing and innovation, into a tool for the automated surveillance and control of its users.

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For much of the year, independent media [including Global Research] has felt the sting of increased social media censorship, as the “revolving door” between U.S. intelligence agencies and social-media companies has manifested in a crackdown on news that challenges official government narratives.

With many notable independent news websites having shut down since then as a result, those that remain afloat are being censored like never before, with social media traffic from Facebook and Twitter completely cut off in some cases. Among such websites, social media censorship by the most popular social networks is now widely regarded to be the worst it has ever been - a chilling reality for any who seek fact-based perspectives on major world events that differ from those to be found on well-known corporate-media outlets that consistently toe the government line.

Last August, [MintPress reported](#) that a new Google algorithm targeting “fake news” had quashed traffic to many independent news and advocacy sites, with sites such as the American Civil Liberties Union, Democracy Now, and WikiLeaks, seeing their returns from Google searches experience massive drops. The *World Socialist Website*, one of the affected pages, reported a 67 percent decrease in Google returns while *MintPress* experienced an even larger decrease of 76 percent in Google search returns. The new algorithm targeted online publications on [both sides](#) of the political spectrum critical of U.S. imperialism, foreign wars, and other long-standing government policies.

Now, less than a year later, the situation has become even more dire. Several independent media pages have reported that their social media traffic has sharply declined since March and - in some cases - stopped almost entirely since June began. For instance, independent media website *Antimedia* - a page with over 2 million likes and follows - saw its traffic drop from around 150,000 page views per day earlier this month to around 12,000 as of this week. As a reference, this time last year *Antimedia's* traffic stood at nearly 300,000 a day.

Other pages, particularly those that promote natural-health news along with political news, have seen their pages deleted without warning by Facebook as recently as earlier this week. One such page, Collectively Conscious, saw its Facebook page with over 900,000 likes and follows deleted without warning after Facebook said the page “violated its terms of use agreement” but did not state which terms had been violated. Other similar pages, such as

Nikola Tesla and Earth We Are One, were likewise suddenly deleted without explanation.

Other pages, such as *the Free Thought Project*, have been flagged as “fake news” by Facebook “fact checking” partner organizations, like *the Associated Press* and *Snopes*. In one recent case, a story published by the *Free Thought Project* was flagged as “false” by *the Associated Press*. That story, [which detailed](#) the documented case of Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) being forcibly removed from a DHS migrant detention center that had once been a Walmart, was marked false because the *Associated Press* asserted that the article made the claim that Walmart was housing immigrants for DHS. However, the article does not make the claim, instead accurately noting that the facility *used to be* a Walmart.

In a troubling turn of events, pages that shared that very story are now being punished by Facebook for helping disseminate “false news.” *The Mind Unleashed*, which has 8.8 million likes and follows, was warned that it would have its reach reduced for this “offense,” and that the reduction in the page’s reach would only increase with the number of offenses after it shared the *Free Thought Project* story on the detention center.

At *MintPress News*, the story is similar. While the *MintPress* Facebook and Twitter pages remain up and no notices warning of their imminent deletion have yet been received, traffic from social media has reached an all-time low, as the site’s average traffic of around 70,000 unique visitors last January has now dropped to around 4,000 – a decrease of around 94 percent. On Tuesday, social media traffic to *MintPress* stopped entirely, as it did for several other independent media sites like *Antimedia*.

Broad-brush censorship: an overreaction on steroids

Given what has been experienced by several independent media sites in recent months, it seems that several known initiatives aimed at censoring content on social media have now taken full effect after being announced earlier this year.

Those initiatives — particularly those being implemented by Facebook, Twitter and Google — [first came to light](#) during a Senate hearing held earlier this year in January. During their testimony, representatives from Facebook detailed that it would employ a team of 20,000 new employees by the end of the year who would “assess potentially violating content” and “fake news” uploaded by the platform’s users. Monika Bickert, head of Global Policy Management at Facebook, told lawmakers at the time that “former intelligence and law-enforcement officials and prosecutors who worked in the area of counterterrorism” are among the members of that new “team” at Facebook.

In the months since, Facebook’s censorship of independent content has continued to spin out of control, with the site prioritizing “trustworthy” sites even though Facebook has not stated how a site’s “trustworthiness” is determined. The site’s censorship efforts, however, reached a crescendo when it was [announced](#) last month that the social media giant would team up with the war-loving, Washington-based think tank, The Atlantic Council, in order to “combat election-related propaganda and misinformation from proliferating” on the social media site.

The Atlantic Council is [funded by](#) the country’s top weapons manufacturers – Raytheon, Lockheed Martin, and Boeing – as well as by NATO and the United Arab Emirates, currently responsible for an offensive on a port in Yemen, slammed by the UN and human rights groups, that threatens to lead to the death of some 18.5 million civilians in the war-torn

country. The Atlantic Council's conflicts of interest with companies, organizations, and countries that benefit from war have raised concern among anti-war news sites that the think tank's partnership with Facebook will negatively affect their own presence on social media.

While many thought that social media censorship on the most commonly used platforms could not get much worse after Facebook's partnership with the Atlantic Council, the upcoming vote by the European Union on the controversial measure known as Article 13 could soon change that. The proposed law, if approved, [would require](#) platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Reddit and others to scan user-uploaded content before it is shown online and take down material that "could be stolen" or infringe on existing copyrights.

Several prominent figures, including World Wide Web inventor Tim Berners-Lee, [warned](#) the EU Parliament that the measure would be "an unprecedented step towards the transformation of the Internet from an open platform for sharing and innovation, into a tool for the automated surveillance and control of its users."

The current censorship of social media is undeniably the worst it has ever been. However, it is unlikely that this troubling trend will get better anytime soon. Instead, it likely to get much worse. If you value fact-based news content that challenges the powerful and scrutinizes official narratives, now is the time to sign up for mailing lists, Steemit and other alternatives that will allow you to continue to receive the content you enjoy amid the increasingly bleak future of news shared via social media.

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