Google intensifies censorship of left-wing websites

Andre Damon
19 September 2017

Google has intensified its censorship of left-wing, progressive and anti-war websites, cutting the search traffic of 13 leading news outlets by 55 percent since April.

On August 2, the *World Socialist Web Site* reported that changes to Google's search algorithm had led the search traffic of these sites to drop by 45 percent, according to figures by the search analysis service SEMRush.

In the ensuing six weeks, the search traffic of every one of these sites, without exception, has plunged further, leading the total search traffic for the sites to fall by an additional nine percentage points.

The *World Socialist Web Site,* whose search traffic had fallen by 67 percent between April and July, has now experienced a total drop in search traffic of 74 percent.

By other measures, the WSWS's performance in search results has been impacted even more substantially. On September 16, the latest date available, articles from the WSWS were shown in search results 68,000 times, down from over 450,000 in April. This constitutes a decline of some 85 percent.

As a result of Google's censorship, the WSWS's global page rank has fallen from 31,000 to 41,000, according to Amazon's Alexa traffic ranking software.

Other sites affected include:

Alternet, one of the top 3,000 sites in the US, has seen its Google search traffic fall by 71 percent between April and September, up from 63 percent in the period through July.

Democracy Now, one of the top 5,000 sites in the US, had its search traffic fall 50 percent between April and September, up from 36 percent in the period through July.

Common Dreams, ranked in the top 8,000 US sites, had its Google search traffic fall by 50 percent between April and September, up from 37 percent in the period through July.

Global Research, one of the top 14,000 sites in the US, had its traffic fall slightly from its massive 62 percent decline between April and July.

Truth-out.org, ranked in the top 12,000 sites in the US, had its search traffic fall by 49 percent, up from 25 percent in the period through July.

The information uncovered by the WSWS has been prominently reported on a number of alternative news websites, including Consortium News, Global Research , Counterpunch, Truthdig, Russia Today, Truepublica and others.

In an article on Truthdig, the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Chris Hedges pointed to the censorship of the WSWS and other left-wing websites: "The ruling elites, who grasp that the reigning ideology of global corporate capitalism and imperial expansion no longer has moral or intellectual credibility, have mounted a campaign to shut down the platforms given to their critics…

"This is a war of ideas. The corporate state cannot compete honestly in this contest. It will do what all despotic regimes do—govern through wholesale surveillance, lies, blacklists, false accusations of treason, heavy-handed censorship and, eventually, violence."

Despite the broad support for the WSWS's calls for an end to Google's Internet censorship, the company has refused to reply either to the WSWS's petition opposing its censorship or repeated attempts to contact it for comment.

While Google's censorship has substantially reduced traffic to the WSWS, its effect has been partially counteracted by readers sharing articles through email

and social media. One widely shared article published on September 9, titled "Why aren't trains evacuating people from the path of Hurricane Irma?", has been viewed over 90,000 times.

While only about 300 people reached the article through Google, tens of thousands accessed it through links from other websites and social media platforms.

In April, Google's vice president of engineering, Ben Gomes, announced in a blog post that the search giant would be implementing changes to its search algorithm to "surface more authoritative content." Google's guidelines for human search evaluators, issued around the same time, stressed that "authoritative" content should appear ahead of "alternative viewpoints."

On August 25, *World Socialist Web Site* Editorial Board Chairman David North issued an open letter to Google demanding that it stop censoring the Internet and end its political blacklisting of the WSWS.

An online petition calling for Google to end its censorship has received over 3,800 signatures from dozens of countries.

Google, however, has not replied to North's letter.

Recent weeks have seen a drastic escalation in calls for Internet censorship. The campaign to censor the Internet—usually justified in the name of "fighting terrorism" and blacking out "fake news"—has assumed international dimensions and is promoted at the highest levels of government. On ABC's *This Week* program on Sunday, the first three people interviewed, including British Prime Minister Theresa May, US National Security Adviser Gen. H.R. McMaster, and Adam Schiff, the ranking Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, called for stricter control of the Internet.

President Donald Trump responded to last week's terror attack in London with a tweet declaring that "we must cut off" the Internet.

In her newly released book, *What Happened?,* Hillary Clinton again attributes her defeat to "fake news." She writes approvingly that "Companies such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google have already begun taking steps—adjusting algorithms, deactivating bot networks, and partnering with fact-checkers"—to fight the "torrent of misinformation" supposedly responsible for the outcome of the election.

Google's actions against the *World Socialist Web Site* and other left and progressive sites are making clear the real targets of Internet censorship: news outlets and political organizations opposing war, social inequality and the domination of society by the financial oligarchy.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact