

New York Times and Wall Street Journal demand censorship of YouTube

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In two articles appearing Tuesday on the front pages of the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*, the newspapers laid out justifications for censoring the online streaming service YouTube, alleging the service is helping disseminate Russian propaganda.

The articles note the substantial reach of RT, the international television network funded by the Russian government, on YouTube, which is owned by Google. RT's videos have as many views as CNN, and substantially more than Fox News.

Citing a January 6 report by the US director of national intelligence, the *Times* describes RT as the "Kremlin's 'principal international propaganda outlet' and a key player in Russia's information warfare operations around the world."

The article complains of RT's "prominent presence on YouTube's search results," which have allowed it to gain "one of the largest online audiences of any news organization in the world."

It quotes Mark Warner, the Virginia Democratic senator leading the Democrats' neo-McCarthyite witchhunt against political opposition on the Internet: "YouTube is a target-rich environment for any disinformation campaign—Russian or otherwise—that represents a long-term, next-generation challenge."

The *Journal*, for its part, complains, "RT's popularity on YouTube, Facebook and Twitter shows how the open approach of social media companies can empower unreliable news sources—from government-backed propaganda outlets to conspiracy theorists to extremist groups." The implication is that this "open" approach should be reconsidered.

The articles attribute RT's popularity on YouTube to allegations that the channel "games" the service's algorithms by mixing in non-political footage with its "propaganda." As such, they create the argument for revising YouTube's algorithms to penalize RT and other

news outlets not under the control of the US ruling establishment.

The *Times* advances its objectives through the views of an analyst whose quote concludes the newspaper's article: "Unless YouTube decides to manually step in, they [RT] will continue to be very present."

The *Wall Street Journal* complains that "YouTube and Facebook have boosted RT by helping years-old clips live on and recommending RT videos to viewers who have shown an interest in news sources outside the mainstream."

The *Journal's* article concludes with a quote from a different analyst, who it paraphrases as saying that technology companies should "label its content as Russian propaganda." It further complains that "Google News also includes RT stories, helping legitimize the site with readers."

Excluded from both articles is the fact that RT is popular because it reports on developments usually ignored in the establishment press.

The *Times* article complains that "Searches on topics on which the Kremlin is typically eager to promote its point of view—American intervention in Syria, the Ukrainian civil war... will often turn up an RT video as one of the top results." Of course, it is on these vital topics of foreign policy that the bias of the US mainstream media is most apparent, leading viewers to seek opposing viewpoints online, including from RT.

YouTube took its first overt action against RT last month when it dropped it from its list of "preferred" channels, as part of what it called a "standard algorithmic update."

Kirill Karnovich-Valua, RT's deputy editor in chief, told the *Times* that the move "speaks to the unprecedented political pressure increasingly applied to all RT partners and relationships in a concerted effort to push our channel out of the US market entirely, and by any means

possible.”

In a separate statement to the *Wall Street Journal*, RT said, “The hysteria surrounding such mundane activities as RT’s social media advertising of its content—something done by practically all news organizations—speaks to the establishment’s fear of losing the monopoly on information, and betrays a concerted effort to push RT out of the US market.”

Last month, the US Justice Department demanded that RT’s US affiliate register as a “foreign agent,” leading some of the independent journalists who work with the channel to fear that they, too, would be forced to register as “foreign agents.”

In a statement underscoring the absurdity of the claims against RT, the *Wall Street Journal* notes, “Unlike other government-funded news outlets, such as the UK’s BBC or the US’s Radio Free Europe, researchers say RT is more overtly political, with a goal of undermining Western institutions and democracies.” How RT is “more overtly political” than Radio Free Europe, which was founded as a source of anti-communist propaganda targeted at the Soviet Bloc, is never explained.

Neither Warner nor the *Times* nor the *Journal* makes any effort to show that any statements made by RT were demonstrably false. Rather, they seek to brand the news outlet as illegitimate solely by virtue of its affiliation with the Russian government.

Their real target, however, is not Russia, but political opposition at home. Behind the scenes, Google has already implemented changes to its algorithms, made in the name of surfacing “authoritative” content, that have slashed search traffic to leading left-wing, anti-war and progressive web sites by more than 55 percent. The *World Socialist Web Site* has been the most heavily targeted, with its search traffic having fallen by more than 74 percent.

Last week, the *World Socialist Web Site* reported that a recent update to Google News led it to almost totally exclude articles from the WSWS, as well as those written by other prominent independent journalists.



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