

Twitter bans RT and Sputnik from advertising

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In an escalation of the efforts to use allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 Presidential election to crack down on social media, Twitter announced on Thursday that it has banned Russian government funded media companies Russia Today (RT) and Sputnik from advertising on the microblogging platform.

In a blog post announcing the move, Twitter claimed that the “decision was based on the retrospective work we've been doing around the 2016 U.S. election and the U.S. intelligence community's conclusion that both RT and Sputnik attempted to interfere with the election on behalf of the Russian government,” insisting, “we did not come to this decision lightly.”

While Twitter has indicated that it would not be blocking any other news outlets from advertising the move sets a chilling precedent, giving the social media platform the ability to decide which news outlets are allowed to promote their content, limiting free speech and freedom of the press online.

Twitter has announced that it will use the \$1.9 million it has collected from RT advertising efforts over the last six years and “donate those funds to support external research into the use of Twitter in civic engagement and elections, including use of malicious automation and misinformation...”

In response to Twitter's allegations, RT's deputy editor-in-chief Kirill Karnovich-Valua stated the outlet “has never been involved in any illegal activity online, and that it never pursued an agenda of influencing the US election through any platforms.”

RT editor-in-chief and head of social media Margarita Siymonyan called Twitter's decision “highly regrettable” and stated that the move was part of the campaign being waged against Russia since the beginning of this year. In a separate tweet, she also

accused Twitter itself of pushing RT to “spend big” during the election.

In a statement on Facebook, Maria Zakharova, a spokeswoman for the Russian Foreign Ministry, called Twitter's decision “yet another aggressive step” and claimed that Twitter was folding under pressure from US intelligence agencies. “Naturally, a response will follow,” Zakharova said.

Sputnik told news agency AFP it “has never used advertising on Twitter.”

Earlier this month, RT claimed that the Department of Justice demanded that the media outlet register itself as a “foreign agent” under the Foreign Agents Registration Act. The law originated in World War II and required companies or individuals considered to be working on behalf of a foreign government in the US to disclose their funding and relationship with foreign governments or actors with the DOJ.

Since US officials first alleged Russian interference in the 2016 election, the ruling elites, with the Democratic Party leading the way, along with Google, Facebook, and Twitter, have been engaged in efforts to censor political dissent online and silence voices genuinely critical of the US government.

Unsubstantiated tales of Kremlin-linked human “trolls” aimed at spreading discontent and conspiracy theories about Hillary Clinton, are being used to justify attempts to stifle free speech on the internet.

Google and Facebook have not stated whether or not they would follow in Twitter in banning RT and Sputnik from advertising, but maintain that “Russian agents” have spent tens of thousands of dollars on advertising with them as well.

Within the last month, both Facebook and Twitter have announced plans to modify the “transparency” of advertising on the social media platforms. Facebook

has begun testing a split newsfeed in Bolivia, Cambodia, Guatemala, Serbia, Slovakia, and Sri Lanka which relegates content from news organization's pages to a separate feed. Journalists and independent media outlets in these countries have reported that their readership from Facebook has collapsed as a result.

In April, Google altered its search engine algorithms to promote more "authoritative" content and censor left wing websites, with the World Socialist Web Site seeing the greatest decline in referrals from the search engine.

Leading officials in the U.S. government who have been pressuring social media companies to impose new limits on their platforms applauded Twitter's decision, but claim that it does not go far enough.

Senator Mark Warner, the top Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, who has been leading the charge to censor the Internet, stated, "I appreciate the effort, although RT and Sputnik have been known entities for some time," adding "what I hope is we'll see enhanced efforts on discovering other fake accounts as well as avatars that might not be as obvious."

Democratic Senator Amy Klobuchar and Republican Senator John McCain, who introduced legislation earlier this month that would require Facebook, Google and other technology companies to disclose who is purchasing online political advertising, said, "the action only underscored the need for a new, across-the-board standard for social media companies to follow when it comes to political advertising," according to the *New York Times*.

In a statement, Klobuchar said, "Twitter's announcement today is a positive step, but one company preventing two outlets—RT and Sputnik—from placing ads on its platform is not a substitute [for government regulation]."

The actions being taken by Twitter and other tech companies in the United States are part of a broader plan to crack down on social opposition as the ruling class pursues imperialist wars abroad and escalates the attack on the living standards of the working class at home.



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