

# YouTube threatens to shut down right-wing Infowars channel

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On March 3, right-wing radio host Alex Jones, publisher of the conspiracy theorist website Infowars, tweeted that his YouTube profile, called the “Alex Jones Channel”, had been frozen and received warnings that “all 33 thousand videos” would be erased within 24 hours.

The next day, a YouTube spokesperson confirmed that the company had removed advertisements from the channel, in a move known as “demonetization.” Several videos posted by the channel have already been removed.

Infowars is a clearinghouse for right-wing conspiracy theories and a gathering place for neo-Nazis and white supremacists. Jones, who has his origins in the far-right militia movement, declared on his program last year that Democrats and communists were planning to unleash “white genocide.” He was also one of the main proponents of “Pizzagate,” claiming that Hillary Clinton was running a child sex ring out of a pizza parlor. Jones has been praised by the editor of the *Daily Stormer* and other far-right figures around the world.

Notably, censoring Jones’ channel has only brought more attention to the right-wing demagogue. Jones, whom claims to be “anti-establishment,” announced that his account was facing “the biggest censorship we have ever seen.” YouTube targeting his channel serves to confirm his allegations, garnering him more support among layers of the population who are opposed to the status quo.

In bringing attention to the implications of YouTube censoring the Alex Jones Channel, the WSWS remains resolutely opposed to the retrograde politics of Jones and those who associate with him. However, the WSWS defends the democratic right to free speech on the Internet and systematically opposes censorship of any kind.

The impetus for suspending the channel came from a video following the Parkland school shooting which suggested student protesters were not victims of the attack but “crisis actors.” Jones’ channel received a strike for the video and a second strike a few days later when it posted a video titled, “David Hogg Can’t Remember His Lines In TV Interview”—which similarly questioned the authenticity of the 17-year-old student activist.

YouTube’s policy states that any account given three strikes faces deletion: the first strike is a warning, the second a temporary suspension and the third a termination. Strikes expire after six months but can also be appealed, YouTube said.

According to YouTube the videos were flagged for violating the site’s community guidelines. However, YouTube’s policies are vague “common-sense rules that’ll help you steer clear of trouble,” according the company itself, and it was never clearly stated what policies the videos Jones posted violated.

In reality, censoring the Alex Jones Channel has nothing to do with a violation of policies, but represents an incremental step in the broader campaign to censor the Internet. By targeting an ultra-right-wing figure that a vast majority of the population reviles and ridicules, those behind the campaign rely on the population dismissing the targeting of Jones as a good riddance.

The attacks on Jones have parallels to the moves in France against National Front leader Marine Le Pen, who was indicted last Thursday for having posted three images of executions by the Islamic State (IS) group on her Twitter account in December 2015. The targeting of “low-hanging fruit” like Jones and Le Pen is an attack on democratic rights, and a precursor to more censorship.

Since the tales of “Russian meddling” began to

circulate in 2016, social media and technology giants, in partnership with the US government and intelligence agencies, have been engaged in a concerted effort to silence voices of opposition. Over the past year, under the banner of combating hate speech and “fake news,” Google has cut off search traffic to left wing, progressive and socialist websites and de-monetized YouTube accounts which have been flagged or don’t meet newly enforced and vaguely defined criteria.

Google, Facebook, and Twitter have all implemented measures aimed at diminishing content not deemed “authoritative,” or acceptable within the circumscribed margins of the corporate media. Facebook altered its algorithms to reduce the visibility of certain news stories, and Twitter has banned the Russian-funded media outlets RT and Sputnik from advertising on the platform. For its part, Google-owned YouTube hired 10,000 reviewers to censor YouTube content and has become more aggressive in implementing its content rules.

Last year, YouTube openly admitted on Twitter that it is censoring videos based on content, stating, “if the video is also not suitable for a wider audience ... then it might see poorer performance.”

Undoubtedly, the censorship of YouTube videos has a significant impact on political discourse. YouTube enjoys a virtual monopoly on pre-recorded video sharing and monetization, with approximately 1.5 billion viewers who watch 1 billion hours of video per day, and hundreds of hours of video uploaded each minute. Furthermore, videos are expected to account for 80 percent of all consumer-based internet traffic in 2019, indicating the far-reaching consequences of censorship measures.

Beneath all the noise about “fake news,” the internet is being turned into a tool and weapon of the ruling classes. It is being sold under the guise of fighting Russian disinformation, and any focus on Jones and Infowars conveniently deflects attention from the larger implications of this shift.



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