Facebook expands censorship to photos and videos

Mike Ingram
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A September 13 statement by Facebook Product Manager Antonia Woodford, titled "Expanding Fact-Checking to Photos and Videos," marks a significant escalation of the company's censorship efforts.

Under the pretense of combating so-called "fake news" and "Russian interference," the social media giant has spent the last two years assembling an army of censors and established partnerships with 27 so-called fact-checker partners in 17 countries. The partners, include the Associated Press, (AP) Agence France-Presse (AFP), *Pagella Politica* in Italy, *Animal Politico* in Mexico and others, together with fact-checking sites such as Factcheck.org, PolitiFact and Snopes.com. At the end of last year, Facebook announced a partnership with the right-wing *The Weekly Standard*, prompting widespread outrage.

As the WSWS reported, the role of this latest partnership was highlighted last week when *The Weekly Standard* flagged an article posted by *ThinkProgress* with the headline "Brett Kavanaugh said he would kill Roe v. Wade last week." The article was flagged as false on the preposterous claim that the word "said" in the headline implied a direct quote, rather than the dictionary definition of "indicate," "show," or "communicate." The *ThinkProgress* incident is only the latest indication of the political character of the censorship by Facebook.

It is unknown exactly how many posts have been flagged as false by Facebook or its fact-checker partners since the program began two years ago. A false flag will reduce future traffic by 80 percent, according to CEO Mark Zuckerberg. Now the program is to be expanded to photos and video—a process that was first detailed in March this year.

The March statement headlined, "Hard Questions: What is Facebook Doing to Protect Election Security?" by VP of Product Management, Guy Rosen, announced, "We're fact-checking photos and videos, in addition to links. We're starting in France with the AFP and will be scaling to more countries and partners soon."

The global expansion of the censorship campaign to photo and video was announced in the September 13 statement. Woodford wrote, "We know that people want to see accurate information on Facebook, so for the last two years, we've made fighting misinformation a priority. One of the many steps we take to reduce the spread of false news is working with independent, third-party fact-checkers to review and rate the accuracy of content. To date, most of our fact-checking partners have focused on reviewing articles. However, we have also been actively working to build new technology and partnerships so that we can tackle other forms of misinformation. Today, we're expanding fact-checking for photos and videos to all of our 27 partners in 17 countries around the world (and are regularly on-boarding new fact-checking partners)."

The statement says that Facebook has "built a machine learning model that uses various engagement signals, including feedback from people on Facebook, to identify false content." The company then sends photos or videos to fact checkers, "or fact-checkers can surface such content on their own," Woodford writes. "Many of our third-party fact-checking partners have expertise evaluating photos and videos and are trained in visual verification techniques, such as reverse image searching and analyzing image metadata, like when and where the photo or video was taken," she continued.

Based on research conducted since March, Facebook claimed that photo and video "misinformation" falls into three categories, "(1) Manipulated or Fabricated, (2) Out of Context, and (3) Text or Audio Claim."

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The claim that Facebook is motivated by the need for accurate content was refuted in an analysis presented last month by one of the company's other "partners," the prominent military think-tank, the Atlantic Council.

Facebook announced last month that it had shut down the event page for a counter-protest to a fascist demonstration called by the organizers of last year's Nazi rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, during which left-wing demonstrator Heather Heyer was murdered by a right-wing extremist. The company also announced that it had shut down 32 other pages, including ones opposing police violence and defending immigrant rights.

The Atlantic Council issued a report which said that the shut-down by Facebook targeted "the left of the political spectrum" and that the pages were an attempt to "infiltrate left-wing American communities." The report said these pages "sought to promote divisions and set Americans against one another."

The report stated that events created by "inauthentic" groups "have a very real, organic, and engaged online community" but that "the intent of inauthentic activity appeared to be designed to catalyze the most incendiary impulses of political sentiment."

It is not so-called "inauthentic" groups that are the catalyst for incendiary political sentiment, but the conditions of social inequality, police repression and war confronting millions of people throughout the world. Facebook's attempt to suppress photo and video postings is an intensification of the company's attempt to hide the true state of American and world society—and more importantly the mounting opposition to it—from the population.

Video footage of police killings has been the catalyst for demonstrations across the United States. A search in the video section of Google for "police shooting" yields 97 million results. The overwhelming majority of these are either bodycam or witness footage of unarmed victims of police violence.

Images of immigrant children sitting in cages after being torn from their mothers' arms by immigration officers likewise provoke the justified outrage of millions of working people throughout the world.

Photographs of the body of three-year-old Alan Kurdî, who drowned in the Mediterranean Sea in 2015 after his family fled war-torn Syria along with thousands of refugees trying to reach Europe, were spread around the world, prompting international outrage.

These are the types of "incendiary" images Facebook is seeking to suppress. Over the past two years, Facebook, along with other technology giants such as Google and Twitter, have become the self-appointed arbiters of "fake news" and "authoritative content."

Working with the intelligence agencies and both Democrats and Republicans, the technology giants are seeking to effectively blacklist any viewpoint opposing that of the official political establishment. The main target of this blacklisting is left-wing and, in particular, socialist viewpoints.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has been in the forefront of the fight against Internet censorship, exposing the conspiracy to censor the Internet beginning with Google's implementation of new algorithms in April 2017 that were aimed at blocking access to the WSWS and other anti-war and progressive web sites. Google's actions resulted in a 70 percent drop in search traffic to the WSWS. Google was quickly followed by Facebook and Twitter. The latest action by Facebook is a further escalation of this and must be opposed.

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