

Republican Perspective
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by Ed Manning

THE MINISTRY OF TRUTH?

“All of us technology companies need to create some tools that help diminish the volume of fake news.” Tim Cook, CEO, Apple

It has been 69 years since “1984,” George Orwell's novel work of dystopian fiction was published. One wonders if we are now living in a modern day version of his superstate Oceania. Freedom of the press is enshrined in our Constitution's First Amendment. This freedom is unrestricted as seen by the yellow journalism of the late 1800's. In case your grandchildren are reading, yellow journalism was a style of newspaper reporting that emphasized sensationalism over facts.

Social media has replaced the print news media. More than two-thirds of all Americans (68 percent) use Facebook. It has 2.23 billion monthly active users. YouTube is becoming the most popular place to watch video. Google is the No. 1 search engine in both the U.S. and the world. Twitter has 335 million active monthly users. You can find the stats at <https://www.statista.com/statistics>.

Social media/tech media companies are the new gatekeepers of the public square. Conservatives are concerned that social media's algorithms are biased. Niall Ferguson, Hoover Institute Senior Fellow said:

“Nothing has changed politics not only in the U.S., but worldwide more than the advent of companies like Facebook. ... Facebook, has the power to tweak the algorithm that determines what gets into your news feed and my news feed. And that is an awesome power. ... Because let's face it Mark Zuckerberg's politics are liberal politics. He has no desire to see 2016 happen again. And I don't think Republicans are fully alive to the fact that with really quite small changes to the way that the Facebook algorithm works, their presence in news feed could shrink dramatically.”

Twitter's practice of shadow banning of conservatives was outed by the investigative non-profit, Project Veritas. Abhinav Vardevu a former software engineer at Twitter said: "The idea of shadow ban is to ban someone but they don't know they've been banned because they keep posting but nobody can see their content. People just think nobody is engaging with their content when in reality nobody is seeing it."

Facebook's news “trending” section routinely suppressed stories of interest to conservative readers. Gizmodo, an on-line technology website, reported that several of Facebook's “news curators” said it had an aversion to conservative news sources. “I believe it had a chilling effect on conservative news,” a former curator said. “I'd come on shift and I'd discover that the Conservative Political Action Conference or Mitt

Romney or Glenn Beck or popular conservative topics wouldn't be trending because either the curator didn't recognize the news topic or it was like they had a bias against Ted Cruz."

Facebook and Twitter temporarily blocked Elizabeth Heng's campaign video because of images of the killing fields of the Khmer Rouge. Ms. Heng is a Republican running for California's 16th Congressional District. Ms. Heng's parents migrated from Cambodia and experienced first hand the brutality of the Khmer Rouge.

The DailyMail.com reported how Facebook aided the Obama election campaign. Carol Davidsen, former media director at Obama for America explained on Twitter that the Obama 2012 campaign was permitted to access the personal data of users because they supported Obama. Davidsen tweeted: "They came to office in the days following election recruiting & were very candid that they allowed us to do things they wouldn't have allowed someone else to do because they were on our side."

Google's YouTube has also restricted conservative content. Prager U is a nonprofit educational organization run by conservative talk show host Dennis Prager. Praeger U produces educational videos designed for all ages and places them on YouTube for its 1.6 million subscribers. Going back to 2016, YouTube placed 21 videos on "restricted mode." This is usually reserved for content to be inappropriate for teenagers. Examples of the restrictions are: "College Made Me a Conservative;" "Why America Must Lead;" "Where are the Moderate Muslims?"

Apple, Facebook, YouTube and Spotify recently banned right-wing Alex Jones, host of InfoWars.

The companies consider his views as "hate speech." Ben Wizner, the director of the American Civil Liberties Union's technology project warned that banning across social media created a dangerous precedent. He said what counts as hate speech "turns out to be an extremely subjective term." Congressman, Ted Deutch (D-FL) supports the ban. Liberal talk show host, Bill Maher said it best: "I don't like Alex Jones, but Alex Jones gets to speak. Everybody gets to speak."

Social media/tech media firms have the right to regulate content. Yet, their algorithms and ad policies should be designed to not target political speech. Disagreement is not hate speech. If they are the arbiters of the news, they must not rely solely on liberal fact-checking sites. They need to treat both liberal and conservative information fairly. The worst outcome is federal government regulation.