

The Resurgent

Silicon Valley Has a Problem

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We need to be concerned with events at three of the biggest players in Silicon Valley: Google, Twitter, and Facebook. Technically, Alphabet is now Google's parent company, but let's go with Google and focus on YouTube.

It turns out, YouTube has been deleting comments referencing the Chinese government's communist propaganda arm. Any time someone criticizes the organization, YouTube deletes the comments. It does not appear YouTube is seeking them out. The logical explanation is that the Chinese Communists are *en masse* tagging the comments as spam and YouTube's computer systems are automatically dumping them.

This is not good and it took public outrage to expose it has been happening for some time. It does make you wonder what else is going on under the hood thanks to manipulation from Chinese communists. Google has wanted to make inroads into China with web browsing. I increasingly am concerned that Google very well could shape information to impact American politics.

If social justice warriors at Google really do contend a diverse group of people is needed to shape what the algorithm displays, but also these same people believe conservatives are not a group worth hearing, it is easy to conclude they will exclude views they disagree with politically.

Concurrently, Twitter has started putting disinformation claims on the President's tweets. Twitter is not doing so to the World Health Organization or the Chinese propagandists spreading anti-American lies on social media. The President overstepped his bounds by accusing Joe Scarborough of murder. Twitter had to do something after the deceased woman's husband spoke up. But to start adding descriptors to the President's tweets and not to his detractors or to communist Chinese propagandists is not only unfair but anti-American.

Twitter is banned in China anyway. It is absurd that they will not only allow Chinese propagandists on Twitter to spread their filth but will treat them better than Twitter treats the American President. It is shameful. Twitter already has a long track record of treating conservatives with contempt and being quicker to censor conservative speech than progressive speech. It is only going to get worse.

Then there is Facebook, the one Silicon Valley company with no aspirations to please China. Facebook does not do business in mainland China and of the three companies is the one that has routinely talked about itself as an American company. With conservatives, Facebook's pitch has always been about its ties to the United States and its unwillingness to go into China and give up user data to China.

Facebook has no need to appease China, but wants desperately to appease American politicians and anti-Trump agitators on the left and in the media. Just a few years ago, Facebook was the darling of the left. There were flattering profiles of Mark Zuckerberg and Facebook's data acquisition efforts tied to how Facebook helped Barack Obama win the presidency.

Then Trump won. Facebook became an easy scapegoat. Democrats have never fully grasped just how badly Hillary Clinton's campaign screwed up. It had to be the Russians or Facebook or Facebook and the Russians together. Now it is Facebook's refusal to censor memes. Humorously, the New York Times can run fawning profiles of leftwing meme generators on Facebook like Occupy Democrats while denouncing rightwing meme generators on Facebook in the same breath.

Had Hillary Clinton won and effectively used Facebook, there would be few complaints about Facebook except on the right. Now, however, the left treats Facebook as the tech company they should control, but don't. Unfortunately, Facebook's response will leave both the left and the right worse off.

To get the negative press off Facebook, Facebook has decided to abdicate its content control to a group of global experts. The list is impressive but problematic.

The board will operate independently of Facebook to review some of the company's most complex calls over whether to take down potentially harmful and often polarizing posts on Facebook and Instagram. It will also serve as a de facto Supreme Court when Facebook users protest the company's removal decisions, capable of overruling even Zuckerberg on content matters.

The group will include people like a former Danish prime minister and an Arab free speech advocate.

Five Americans were selected among the board's 20 initial members, picked to reflect viewpoints from across the political spectrum.

The panel includes John Samples, a First Amendment scholar and vice president at the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute, who is writing a book on why the government should not regulate social media speech. Another pick was Michael McConnell, a former federal judge appointed by President George W. Bush who directs the Constitutional Law Center. Pamela Karlan, a former DOJ civil rights attorney turned Stanford law professor, who is an expert in voting and the political process, will sit on the board. She will be joined by Jamal

Greene, a constitutional law professor at Columbia University who was a fellow at the Knight First Amendment Institute, and Evelyn Aswad, a State Department veteran who teaches human rights law at the University of Oklahoma.

My understanding is that if a content issue arises from the United States, one American is guaranteed to be on a panel of experts to decide the issue, but it will not be exclusively Americans deciding the content issue.

I think Facebook needs to change this. As a company that has pointed out its Americanness, the United States is the gold standard on free speech laws. Having a majority of people who are not American on a panel to decide content issues in the United States only ensures the odds of regressive speech rules. When other countries do not value free speech as U.S. law does, it will drag Facebook away from free speech over time.

Facebook is a private company and can do what it wants. In fairness, the reason Facebook is doing this is because it actually is interested in the concerns about content from a broad perspective and is not just trying to humor progressives, but both the left and right. Facebook also is increasingly seeing calls to break apart the company because it is both successful and viewed as bad guy by the left for daring to entertain conservative concerns.

I think many of the conservative grievances about Facebook have originated out of grievance porn on the right, i.e. complaints to get attention that have a limited basis in reality, see e.g. Diamond and Silk. Conservatives have ample reason to distrust Silicon Valley, but of the various companies there, Facebook has been the easiest to work with and the one most accommodating of conservative concerns. I find myself continually disappointed in conservative agitators who cannot distinguish between Facebook and Twitter. Facebook is no saint, but it is also not systematically seeking to limit conservative free expression in the way Twitter is.

That said, I think this is a troubling development at Facebook. I understand why it wants to pass the buck on content to a panel of experts. I just don't think it should. I think the preferred approach should be to either have panels of experts that are country-specific or plant the flag for American free speech and elevate the rest of the world to our standard.

Of course, that is easy for me to say. I do not have the global media complex and bureaucratic agitators out to break up my company all because Donald Trump won an election.