

The InfoWars Bans Aren't About Alex Jones, They're About Big Tech's Control Over What We See

This is about what it means for our society if a few tech companies should be able to decide for everyone what information is available, and what is over the line.

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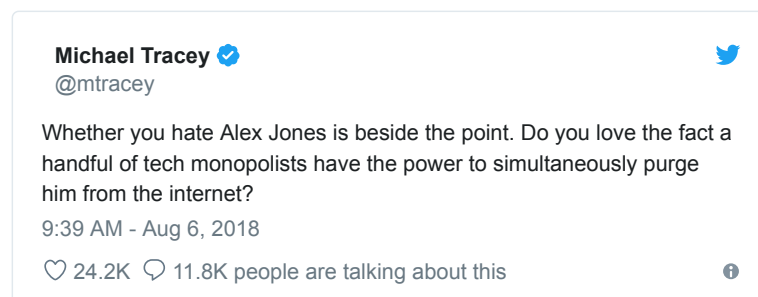
Over the last week, Apple, Facebook, Spotify, and YouTube have all taken down content and channels from right-wing fringe type Alex Jones and his outlet InfoWars. These channels had millions of subscribers and billions of views, and Jones used them to spread sometimes wacky information and interact with people across the world.

The **companies list repeated violations of their policies** as the reason Jones's materials **are no longer on their sites**. But this isn't about whether you like Jones or think he's a reprehensible human being. Rather, this is about what it means for our society if a few tech companies should be able to decide for everyone what information is available, and what is over the line.

Who Is This Dude, Anyway?

Jones is most well-known for his radio show, “The Alex Jones Show,” and InfoWars.com, his site that covers far-right issues and conspiracy theories at length. He also runs PrisonPlanet.com and NewsWars.com. He’s a self-described libertarian and paleoconservative.

Well known for being a strong proponent of gun rights, strongly pro-Trump, and anti-Clinton, he also holds less-mainstream views. Some of those include opposing vaccinations, saying vaccines cause autism and that children’s programming normalizes autism. Jones’s media empire also delves into conspiracy theories, like that the government controls the weather and can weaponize it, that race wars are imminent, and that numerous school shootings were false flags, or governmental covert operations.



It’s not entirely accurate to describe this as purging Jones from the Internet, since his websites are still online and his content is still **streamable directly from those sites**. However, when these companies removed Jones and his content they made it much more difficult for Jones to interact with new people. This might not be government censorship, but it is suppressing his ideas and views, and those of others on his channels.

What You Think Is Hate Speech Isn't What Others Do

Many of Jones's views are problematic and troubling. It's certainly not only liberals and centrist people who find Jones and his ideas disagreeable. This isn't about agreeing or disagreeing with someone, though, it's about whether part of a free society is having no discussion at all about certain ideas.

Should there be views that are considered so problematic, or are expressed in ways that are so hateful and inflammatory, that the largest channels for virtual discussion no longer host them or allow links to them? That's really what's at stake here, not Jones himself or his individual statements.

These companies are defending the content removals, citing material that violated user agreements. **YouTube explained that**, "When users violate ... policies repeatedly, like our policies against hate speech and harassment or our terms prohibiting circumvention of our enforcement measures, we terminate their accounts." **Facebook's removals** came after they decided that Jones's material was violent: "Upon review, we have taken it down for glorifying violence ... and using dehumanizing language to describe people who are transgender, Muslims and immigrants, which violates our hate speech policies."

Apple's statements **were similar**: "Apple does not tolerate hate speech, and we have clear guidelines that creators and developers must follow to ensure we provide a safe environment for all of our users." None of these reasons are frivolous, and as private companies Google, Apple, and Facebook do have the ability to set their own usage terms.

Yet, as social media plays a bigger and bigger part in daily lives and public discourse, it's worth examining if these platforms are no longer merely trivial or lighthearted but have become interwoven with the fabric of our society. These companies have courted and encouraged this dynamic, and they've worked to make themselves indispensable and important

parts of sharing information and talking through ideas.

Should the ‘Fringe’ Line Be Drawn by Liberal Techsters?

While I’m not always a fan of slippery slope arguments, this is a time to examine if this is only the beginning of stripping away content creators who don’t agree with mainline or politically correct positions, and that should deeply concern everyone interested in free speech, even those who don’t care for Jones and his positions.

It’s not too far a leap to worry about this. Facebook especially merits concern, with its recent removal of content that they deemed fake news, **including satirical materials like those of the Babylon Bee**. While Facebook walked back on that move after an outcry, it took the public noticing and pushing back for them to reverse.

The Babylon Bee had published a clearly over-the-top satirical story headlined “CNN Purchases Industrial Sized Washing Machine to Spin News Before Publication,” and was quickly notified that they faced demonetization and a reduction in reach for it. Conservative sites, even those focused on humor and satire, are clearly in the line of fire for these media giants, and it’s important for all of us to contemplate what it means if they start just shutting down everything they don’t personally like.

We’re less than a generation into life with social media, and all of this is new and evolving. This is the time to decide what’s the right place for private companies and their role in discussion and the dissemination of information, and free speech needs to be protected as a fundamental right.

Today it’s Jones and InfoWars. But we don’t know what views will be over the invisible line tomorrow, and where that line will end up. Deeming some content too extreme, too hateful, too egregious means that eventually any content can be unacceptable, and that should be a terrifying thought. This isn’t about protecting Jones, it’s about protecting the views of everyone.

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