

DHILLON: Microsoft Wants To Pick The News You Read In Order To Steer Your Politics To The Left

Harmeet K. Dhillon |

Controlling what news voters do and do not receive has become a big focus in the digital age. Mainstream media giants and establishment political operatives alike have long fought to stigmatize, discredit, and censor any news that doesn't fit their agendas.

Now a familiar player is getting into the censorship game: Microsoft just announced that the tech giant's Edge web browser will feature a "NewsGuard" plugin that will display a big red exclamation mark and a scolding warning when users view news outlets its censors dislike. Media outlets hand-selected by NewsGuard and Microsoft, on the other hand, will get a big friendly green check mark and flattering praise of their journalistic merit.

Who are the approved "green check mark" news sources? The left-leaning, establishment media outlets you would expect: CNN, The Huffington Post, The Washington Post, and so on. These are the same sites that rushed to publish dozens of demonstrably false stories about Catholic high schoolers

harassing a Vietnam veteran — and wound up putting those teenagers and their families in the crosshairs of a vicious internet hate mob — and then, largely refused to apologize for getting the story completely wrong.

Other members of the “good news” club include Rolling Stone, responsible for making a cover story out of the most destructive rape hoax since the Scottsboro Boys, and BuzzFeed News, responsible for the report accusing President Trump of committing a felony by allegedly telling Michael Cohen to lie to Congress. The story was so [outrageously false](#) that Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s office issued a rare public statement to disavow it.

Which media sources are arrayed on the other side of this equation, the “bad news” bears designated on NewsGuard with red exclamation points? Exactly who you’d expect: Breitbart News; Drudge Report; the Daily Mail, Britain’s third-largest newspaper; and other outlets popular outside the Acela corridor.

In the end, this scheme is really no different than the dubious “fact checks” that holier-than-thou establishment media outlets have used to belittle their competitors and silence people who see the world a little differently than the folks in newsrooms in New York, Washington, and Los Angeles.

It should come as no surprise that NewsGuard’s creators and censors come from the same media world they seek to police, mostly former editors and publishers of establishment news and opinion publications. Nor should the syrupy praise their former colleagues and co-workers are already [lavishing](#) on the scheme be surprising – it has become a commonplace belief among

these paternalistic elites that the common man needs to be protected from raw, “unfiltered” news and opinion.

The most novel aspect of this news-censoring trend is Microsoft’s involvement. Google and Facebook have been engaging in media censorship for years, but this is older generation big tech getting in on the act, perhaps in some ways demonstrating that it has to censor just to keep up with its younger, and more innovative, social media brethren.

What’s at stake here? News outlets such as Breitbart have [broken](#) some of the biggest scandals eating away at Microsoft and other tech giants’ public images.

Luckily for Americans who are uncomfortable with this kind of big-brother censorship, and who wish to decide for themselves which news outlets they trust, Microsoft Edge is one of the least popular major web browsers, and so this late-to-the-game censorship move could have limited impact.

The latest estimates [suggest](#) that only a little over 2 percent of internet users browse with Edge. Google’s Chrome, by contrast, accounts for [half](#) of the entire U.S. browser market.

Chalk up one more ostensibly neutral search engine going the way of the dinosaurs, to be replaced with a paternalistic “helper” to steer consumers into narrow channels blessed by our digital overlords, and away from the big, bad, open seas of information.

Harmeet Dhillon is a nationally recognized lawyer focusing in commercial litigation, employment law, First Amendment rights, and election law matters.

Editor's Note: A previous version of this opinion article used the words "by default" and "immediately" but did not specify that while versions of Microsoft Edge are pre-loaded with "NewsGuard," users must turn the plug-in on in their settings. Those words have been removed to clarify the meaning.