

Unpacking the Deplatforming of Alex Jones An Analysis of the effectiveness of social media pressure

by IWB

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I'll try and sprinkle citations throughout the summation here – try and analyze the links and citations as a whole, and not on a link-by-link basis. There may be a CNN link or two in here – don't immediately dismiss it. Just entertain the thought that we'll get to a specific place in the end and critical thinking is rooted in logic, not emotion, and casting aside a hyperlink based on it's domain make you just as bad as those that quarantined you here.

To start, CNN Tech's Dylan Byers let's us know [here](#), with a currently accepted timeline of events:

Tim Cook sends Mark Zuckerberg scrambling

Amid mounting public pressure to address Jones' hate speech, Tim Cook and Eddy Cue met and decided that AJ was no longer worth the headaches they were suffering from. More on that, later.

After Zuck heard the word, he decided it was now or never and pulled four of AJ's pages.

This is a few weeks after Facebook had another row with AJ, suspending him for **30 days** over hate speech and bullying. Note the picture they use to lead that one. Fantastic.

Of note, these are the violations cited:

In two of the Infowars videos in question, Jones asserted Muslims were taking over control of European countries. Another video, titled “How To Prevent Liberalism,” depicted a man shoving a young boy to the ground, while in the fourth video Jones compared the creators of a show featuring animated drag queens to Satanists.

The Pressure? It came from Jared Holt, a Research Associate for [Right Wing Watch](#), which is an outfit that **is**:

dedicated to monitoring and exposing the activities and rhetoric of right-wing activists and organizations in order to expose their extreme agenda. Our researchers monitor dozens of broadcasts, emails and websites, and use their expertise on right-wing movements to analyze and distill that information for media, allies and the general public. By shedding light on the activities of the right-wing movement, we help expose the risks its extreme and intolerant agenda presents to our country. We do not endorse the views of groups that we report on.

The [People For The American Way](#) (just read it a few times in your head – I bet it's not what you think it is – it was founded by Norman Lear in the early 1980s in opposition of the Moral Majority. [This link](#) will tell you where they through their money regarding federal elections (both who they support and who they don't.

Back to Jared – he describes his motivation and tacticts in this [Salon piece](#):

*...In recent weeks, a group of progressive activists has dialed up efforts to pressure these distribution platforms to drop Infowars. **That pressure, which comes at a time when court proceedings against Jones have finally begun in earnest,** created the momentum that led to this decision. This has been mentioned in passing in much of the coverage, but these folks deserve much more credit and recognition for the work they've been doing in trying to fight right-wing disinformation campaigns.*

Salon spoke recently with Jared Holt, a researcher from Right Wing Watch, a project of People for the American Way. Holt's work has been instrumental in getting social media and other internet platforms to give Infowars the boot. This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.

[Author]: I follow you on Twitter and noticed that you seemed to be spearheading the effort to kick Alex Jones off Spotify. Am I right in this assumption?

I first brought attention to the fact that Spotify was hosting Infowars' programming and tweeted about it. That was amplified by the progressive group Sleeping Giants, which brought it into the national attention, from my relatively niche Twitter account. People were upset and threatened to boycott Spotify. That got the attention of reporters who asked Spotify about it. Then I also wrote an article laying out the

case for why Infowars clearly violates Spotify's own hosting rules.

There's a lot to unpack there already.

Right Wing Watch is a Project of People For The American Way and describes itself as follows:

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It seems he has a 23 episode podcast of his own that he started in February and has had some trouble getting it launched on spotify. All 23 episodes seem to be [here](#).

Back to Salon.

[Author] You work at Right Wing Watch and People for the American Way by tracking right-wing misinformation sites. Why is it so important to go after these guys? What danger do they present to the public?

It's in the name of Infowars. It's not an attempt at legitimate reporting. It's a, quote, "war" for your mind.

Unfortunately, their war for the American mind is to stuff it full of conspiracy theories. That ultimately debases people from reality and polarizes them to the extremes of right-wing politics. Historically, we've seen that can be very harmful for the vision of America as a free and open democracy.

I think it's important to realize that people like Alex Jones are using these platforms in bad faith.

So, to review, we had Jared Holt, who is employed at Right Wing Watch, a Project of the People For The American Way, a liberal 501c3 who have to file their taxes publically. But there are other ways of regulating platforms, as reddit has a way of doing it (I believe I represent that function here at least half the week), as well as Twitter and Youtube, which we'll get to in a bit.

But first I want to direct your attention to Democracy Matters: A Strategic Plan For Action, [a leaked memo](#) from a Democracy Matters retreat in Florida last year.

In the next four years, Media Matters will continue it's core mission of disarming right-wing misinformation, while leading the fight against the next generation of conservative disinformation: The proliferation of fake news and propaganda now threatening the country's information ecosystem. Here's what success will look like:

Serial misinformers and right-wing propagandists inhabiting everything from social media to the highest levels of government will be exposed, discredited

Internet and social media platforms, like Google and Facebook, will no longer uncritically and without consequence host and enrich fake news sites and propagandists.

Toxic alt-right social media fueled harassment campaigns that silence dissent and poison our national discourse will be punished and halted.

...sound familiar at all? Would Alex Jones have been deplatformed if he stuck to conspiracy theories and stayed out of political endorsements? Or was this all a stunt and he'll come out looking solid on the other side anyway? And what about other social media companies? We all know how reddit gins up their algorithms to weigh certain subs over others. Twitter has their own algorithms, as does Facebook, who also have moderators (of which they actually

pay). But how much of this is automated? Once you get put on a list how do you get off? We'll get to that – and it seems easy to do if you have enough twitter followers.

On Page 8 (PDF warning) of a white paper that came out of Senator Mark Warner's (D-VA) office, titled [Potential Policy Proposals for Regulation of Social Media and Technology Firms](#) states something that sounds familiar:

Make platforms liable for state-law torts (defamation, false light, public disclosure of private facts) for failure to take down deep fake or other manipulated audio/video content – due to section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, internet intermediaries like social media platforms are immunized from state tort or criminal liability. However, the rise of technology like DeepFakes – sophisticated image and audio synthesis tools that can generate fake audio or video files falsely depicting someone saying or doing something – is poised to usher in an unprecedented wave of false and defamatory content, with state law-based torts (dignitary torts) potentially offering the only effective redress to victims. Dignitary torts such as defamation, invasion of privacy, false light, and public disclosure of private facts represent key mechanisms for victims to enjoin – and deter – sharing of this kind of content.

Currently the onus is on victims to exhaustively search for, and report, this content to platforms who frequently take months to respond and who are under no obligation thereafter to proactively prevent the same content from being re-uploaded in the future. Many victims describe a 'whack-a-mole' situation.

...thus, a revision of section 230 could provide the ability of users who have successfully proved that sharing of particular content by another user constituted a dignitary tort to give notice of this judgement to a platform; with this notice, platforms would be held liable in instances where they did not prevent the content in question from being re-uploaded in the future.

Here is an example of a case regarding defamation that might be relevant. Here is another.

So, here's how the government can do it. That's how some strange online army of DNC watchers can do it. On Youtube, you're ability to livestream and connection to the platform can be disconnected and a strike put on your account just for talking about wrongthink. **In real time** Don't believe me?

If you dig a bit more into this – it seems that your content is being monitored as you type it (and even as you speak it). Maybe you're just put in Twitter **time out**.

It's only a matter of what kind of **list** you're on and who's aiming to silence you. Or demonetize you. Or deplatform you. Or harass you.