

Thesis

Are freedoms being oppressed on the internet?

To a lot of people, it may seem like it's a good thing to get rid of people they disagree with or find abhorrent, but it shows precedent that companies such as Google, Facebook and Twitter, among others can use every tactic to get rid of unwanted opinions. Why is this a dangerous power dynamic? Because we usually have little to no control over how these sites operate, we're not chairmen of the board to any of these companies, we can only *suggest* changes that we might want. We can't directly influence these platforms of speech like we can in a democratic political system.

History

We used to have so many other options than just Reddit or Twitter. Before Reddit was popular, many different forums were used to communicate. Likewise, before Twitter dominated social networks, Blogspot and Wordpress were used to share comments and opinions, known as blogging, to the public. Today, every forum community has migrated to Reddit, and everyone uses Twitter instead of their own Blogspot. Why? It's more convenient, but why isn't freedom convenient in this modern age? Are we naturally greedy? That's quite the possibility. It would make sense, we once were animals and we are more often than not still a slave to these instincts.

According to this [article](#), Facebook lacks the resources to translate certain dialects of Arabic, and this allows bad actors to exploit this lack of resources to break ToS, so what does Facebook do about this? They blanket ban certain dialects of Arabic. While not a prime example most people would think of as censorship or oppression, it certainly counts. Mentioned in this [article](#), Facebook has good relations with Israel, and Israel holds Facebook's only office in the Middle East which makes it much easier for Israel's government to make Facebook take down Palestinian accounts and content. I would most certainly call this oppression. Both of these are examples of the way that Facebook continues to uphold racism and classism perpetuated by themselves and other governments.

These are certainly good examples of oppression in the tech space, but what about oppression through inconvenience? Is that even a thing? Features can be changed to make working on a piece of hardware more difficult, prompting the user to be forced to upgrade to a newer model. This is called planned obsolescence. Is it oppression? I'm not sure, perhaps an indirect form of it, after all most of these companies hold power over the customers. If they really wanted to, they could send out an update to brick your printer permanently so you'd be forced to buy a new one.

[Is the removal of the dislike button](#) an act of censorship? While Google argues it's to protect creators, it makes it harder for people who use the site to gauge whether content is bad or good, which I'd consider a core part of the site. Even one of Youtubes co-founders agrees

that it's a bad decision. Now why can this be perceived as censorship? Because it makes the easiest way of getting your opinion out harder. While comments exist, do most people really take a large amount of time to gauge whether a youtube video is bad by reading comments? No, they would just look at the like to dislike ratio to see if it is good, bad or controversial. Why would Google remove the dislike button? Most likely to protect their corporate interests. The issue cited in the removal of the dislike button was dislike bombing, which is the act of mass disliking a video. More often than not, dislike bombing can be used as a way to protest change, or a product that people are unhappy about. It could be said that dislike bombing can be a legitimate form of protest, because the companies who are the victims of this notice these dislikes and it can affect their bottom line. Youtube is essentially removing a way to express your opinion to protect profit.

Agents of Change

Ironically enough, one of the biggest agents of change for the issues regarding Facebook would have to be the US government, albeit they're more focused on the societal problems related to social media rather than censorship.

How can we change things? By simply not using these products. The issue with this is trying to convince people to move to better alternatives like Matrix or Mastodon. It boils down to many reasons, such as "My friends won't switch to it with me." among others. While a lot of these alternatives are still being developed compared to the much more feature rich proprietary apps we use, they're simply better by the virtue of not being a surveillance system that uses your data for profit.

The way Mastodon works is that instead of being on one centralized server, anyone can make their own server using the Mastodon service. Essentially, if you don't like the way a server is going socially, you can leave it and make your own server, or join someone else's. With something like Twitter, you can't do this, because then you'd be leaving the site as a whole. [Here is a more detailed rundown on how Mastodon works](#). A way to describe the way Mastodon works would be the word "Decentralized".

What differentiates Mastodon from Reddit? It's that if you make a subreddit, it's hosted on Reddit's servers, but on Mastodon, you host your own server. This allows you to do whatever you want, and this means unsavoury servers pop up because of this.

This is the double edged sword of the license Mastodon uses, the GNU Public License. The GPL is a software license that allows people to reuse code, as long as it stays open source (This is a very short explanation of the license, here is a better [explanation](#).), but there are no restrictions to what you can do with the code otherwise. This means that anyone can use your code, and as long as it stays GPL, you can't complain or do anything about it. So while these unsavoury Mastodon servers/forks may be against the principles of the Mastodon community (Ex. Gab), they're breaking no rules as long as they abide by the GPL. An example of the GPL not being abided by would be Donald Trump's own social media service Truth Social, which was found to be using Mastodon while being closed source (No access to the source code).

Conclusion

I think I've gathered enough evidence to conclude that there is oppression on the internet, not just coming from trolls and racists, but from the companies that have control over the internet itself. Is there a way to destroy the order of things that the internet has become? I'm not so sure. I find it hard to believe that we can convince people to let go of their prejudices, and I find it harder to believe that we can make these companies accountable for what they do.

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