News Item

Facebook Shouldn’t Ban Infowars; Here’s Why | National Review

By Theodore Kupfer
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Theodore Kupfer argues against the recent outcry directed at Facebook for failing to ban InfoWars, a media platform known for spreading conspiracy theories, saying that it may only amplify the site’s influence. He notes that it is challenging to craft policy around content at the political margins of society, and asks if tech companies should just avoid doing so entirely.

> One consideration that militates against the wisdom of banning Infowars is the specter of martyrization, which always looms when a speaker who has convinced his audience that he is besieged by the liberal cultural hegemony is ostracized by the powers that be. In the broadest sense, Facebook can’t make Alex Jones go away; banning him might add to his support and further radicalize his fans. When online platforms kick off marginal-but-popular users, they risk splintering our online ecosystem even further, encouraging disillusioned users to flock to alternative websites where gleefully prejudiced or otherwise marginal politics are the norm. This is a scenario we should want to avoid.
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> Beyond the obvious point that content policies are tricky to write, these cases testify to how easy it is for content-policy skirmishes to devolve into culture wars that break down along partisan lines. A company will be shamed by the left for fomenting hate if its policy is too lenient, accused by the right of censorship if it’s too restrictive.
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> There is plenty of content online that ought to shock any well-adjusted conscience, and there should be no defending the substance of much of it. But just as Alex Jones has a Facebook page, so too do white nationalists have subreddits, anti-religious bigots have YouTube channels, and Maoists have a Twitter scene. Perverse as it may seem, there is some value in tech companies leaving the

> marginal or indefensible alone. It’s wrong to assert that the answer to these questions is obvious, and it’s hard to shake the feeling that the fight over what tech companies should allow on their platforms is actually a more conventional struggle for political power.

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