



Glenn Beck: Fooled by Facebook?

In the wake of reports that Facebook censors conservative voices, media figure Glenn Beck met with company chairman Mark Zuckerberg and emerged from the meeting, as he [put it](#), “convinced that Facebook is behaving appropriately and trying to do the right thing.” Nothing to see here, move along. Unfortunately, this is nonsense.

Beck admits in his [article on this subject](#), “I am not an expert on data or AI or algorithms.” Neither am I. But the Facebook censorship in the news isn’t about artificial intelligence but human intelligence — and its biases. In fact, the focus on technology could be (I’m not implying this is the case with Beck) an effort at Machiavellian misdirection: “Watch what the machine is doing, watch the machine, so you don’t see the man behind the curtain.”



I’ll get right to the point. Fraudbook employs a group of young journalists, known as “news curators,” who are empowered to manage the algorithmic results and “refine” what qualifies for the site’s “Trending Topics” section. As company vice president of search Tom Stocky [put it](#), the curators “audit topics surfaced algorithmically: reviewers are required to accept topics that reflect real world events, and are instructed to disregard junk or duplicate topics, hoaxes, or subjects with insufficient sources.”

So already evident is a Fraudbook deception: the Trending Topics section is supposed to reflect “popularity,” not political correctness. Who decides what constitutes “real world events”? What is a “junk” topic and who defines such? Should “duplicate topics” be disregarded if that duplication reflects trends and popularity? Why should “insufficient sources” disqualify a story, given that great breakthroughs — in science *and* news — often begin with one person’s endeavors? (When the story becomes well known, or “popular,” other journalists investigate the matter and separate fact from fiction; this can’t happen if it’s suppressed in the first place.) And while no one wants hoaxes promoted, we could even wonder how often incredible but true stories are labeled hoaxes by credulous or biased curators.

And who are these people empowered to decide who is an unreal-world, junky, topic-duplicating, insufficiently-sourced, possible hoaxer? Gizmodo.com, which broke the recent Fraudbook story, [tells us](#) they are “a small group of young journalists, primarily educated at Ivy League or private East Coast universities, who curate the ‘trending’ module on the upper-right-hand corner of the site.” LOL, c’mon, Glenn, are you gonna let these people spit down your back and tell you it’s rainin’? While tech workers are notoriously liberal, as the statistics [here](#) show, journalism majors from “Ivy League or private East Coast universities” make them look like William F. Buckley. Fact: Giving people the power to “refine”



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news is synonymous with human bias entering the equation.

And you cannot give young, hardcore liberal journalists from “elite” schools that power without a strong liberal bias entering the equation.

Of course, the nature of biases is that people generally aren’t aware, at least not fully, of their biases. Just consider a *Guardian* defense of Fraudbook. The news organ interviewed an ex-Fraudbook curator who challenged Gizmodo’s report and related, writes the paper, “that newsworthiness was determined by how often a story appeared on a list of trusted news outlets including this publication [the *Guardian*], the *New York Times* and the BBC.” Are you getting this, Glenn?

That the ex-employee and *Guardian* consider this exculpatory of Fraudbook tells the tale: They’re so oblivious to their own biases they consider left-wing, mainstream-media news sources “unbiased” arbiters of newsworthiness. Obviously, if you use leftist entities to “refine” your algorithmic results, you’ll get Al Gore-rhythmic results.

So as Gizmodo put it, “In other words, Facebook’s news section operates like a traditional newsroom, reflecting the biases of its workers and the institutional imperatives of the corporation.” Without a doubt. Liberal journalists censoring the news? Check. Institutional guidelines elevating supposed real-world events and disqualifying supposed junk? Check. Reliance upon other left-wing sources to determine real-world quality, junkiness and newsworthiness, creating a liberal echo chamber? Check. Fraudbook’s trending team couldn’t be more like a traditional newsroom if it tried.

So while a selling point of big social media is that it’s a democratic arena in which “the people” determine what’s seen and heard, it’s instead more like professional wrestling circa 1980: certainly fake but still claiming authenticity. Of course, Fraudbook has a right (at least under our system, as opposed to the statist one Zuckerberg is working to visit upon us) to adopt whatever policies it wishes. But how about some truth in advertising? Don’t claim to be presenting merely what’s “popular.”

Beck should also note that Fraudbook has been caught censoring news time and again. As the Gatestone Institute [wrote](#) in February, “It was only a few weeks ago that Facebook was forced to back down when caught permitting anti-Israel postings, but censoring equivalent anti-Palestinian postings.” Even more damning, at a UN development summit in New York in September, Zuckerberg met with German chancellor Angela Merkel. “As they sat down,” continued Gatestone, “Chancellor Merkel’s microphone, still on, recorded Merkel asking Zuckerberg what could be done to stop anti-immigration postings being written on Facebook. She asked if it was something he was working on, and he assured her it was.”

And I’m sure Merkel would describe Zuckerberg as someone who was “humble, open, and listened intently,” which, by the way, are the precise words Beck used to describe the Fraudbook figures (including Zuck) he met with. Zuck told Merkel what she wanted to hear, which happened to be the truth; and Zuck told Beck what he wanted to hear, which happened to not be. Zuck is concerned about making money and Fraudbook’s stock price, you see.

Having said this, I doubt Zuck is fully aware of the news curators’ shenanigans. Again, people, liberals especially, are often blithely unaware of emotionally satisfying biases woven into organizations. Stories of Fraudbook censorship of conservatives are legion, however. And while it involves not censorship but an effort at undermining, I have one myself.

Aside from my syndicated pieces, I write exclusive news/commentary articles for *The New American* (TNA), which has both a website and hard-copy magazine. And as many sites do, TNA has Fraudbook’s



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“Like” button at the top of every article; it indicates how many Fraudbook users read, liked the piece, and chose to click the button. Well, for more than a year and ending only about a year ago, I and members of *TNA*’s staff noticed a strange and consistent phenomenon: Likes would accumulate on a piece and then “poof!” they’d disappear with the counter having been dialed back to zero. This happened consistently across all *TNA* articles; in one case, one of my pieces had 30,000 likes before they were sent to the gulag.

One might consider this a glitch, but I never observed the phenomenon at any liberal/mainstream-media site. And why does it matter? Because likes are a good metric for not just popularity but also level of readership, and people are influenced by what’s popular. Make an article’s content appear unread and unpopular and people are more likely to dismiss it as a fringe view.

I always assumed, and this accords with Gizmodo’s findings, that the like-button manipulation was the work of one or two rogue (and petty) employees — who were operating in a liberal organization that would turn a blind eye to such shenanigans. Yet Beck’s thoughts are different. In a further glowing endorsement of Fraudbook, he was [quoted](#) in a May 19 *Time* piece as saying about his meeting with the company’s representatives, “I thought it was great. I thought they were sincere. And as I was leaving, I thought: ‘What company has done that with conservatives?’ Especially a media company.” That’s what he thought, alright. And here’s what I think: that Facebook has two faces, and one of them is seen only by big names that Zuck et al. can use for photo-ops and public-relations purposes.

And that’s likely what happened with you, Mr. Beck. You found Zuck and Company cordial — they just find you useful.

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