

Google's chief search engineer legitimizes new censorship algorithm

By Andre Damon
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Between April and June, Google completed a major revision of its search engine that sharply curtails public access to Internet web sites that operate independently of the corporate and state-controlled media. Since the implementation of the changes, many left wing, anti-war and progressive web sites have experienced a sharp fall in traffic generated by Google searches. The *World Socialist Web Site* has seen, within just one month, a 70 percent drop in traffic from Google.

In a blog post published on April 25, Ben Gomes, Google's chief search engineer, rolled out the new censorship program in a statement bearing the Orwellian title, "Our latest quality improvements for search." This statement has been virtually ignored by the corporate media. Neither the *New York Times* nor the *Wall Street Journal* has reported the statement. The *Washington Post* limited its coverage of the statement to a single blog post.

Framed as a mere change to technical procedures, Gomes's statement legitimizes Internet censorship as a necessary response to "the phenomenon of 'fake news,' where content on the web has contributed to the spread of blatantly misleading, low quality, offensive or downright false information."

The "phenomenon of 'fake news'" is, itself, the principal "fake news" story of 2017. In its origins and propagation, it has all the well-known characteristics of what used to be called CIA "misinformation" campaigns, aimed at discredited left-wing opponents of state and corporate interests.

Significantly, Gomes does not provide any clear definition, let alone concrete examples, of any of these loaded terms ("fake news," "blatantly misleading," "low quality," "offensive," and "down right false information.")

The focus of Google's new censorship algorithm is

political news and opinion sites that challenge official government and corporate narratives. Gomes writes: "[I]t's become very apparent that a small set of queries in our daily traffic (around 0.25 percent), have been returning offensive or clearly misleading content, which is not what people are looking for."

Gomes revealed that Google has recruited some 10,000 "evaluators" to judge the "quality" of various web domains. The company has "evaluators—real people who assess the quality of Google's search results—give us feedback on our experiments." The chief search engineer does not identify these "evaluators" nor explain the criteria that are used in their selection. However, using the latest developments in programming, Google can teach its search engines to "think" like the evaluators, i.e., translate their political preferences, prejudices, and dislikes into state and corporate sanctioned results.

Gomes asserts that these "evaluators" are to abide by the company's Search Quality Rater Guidelines, which "provide more detailed examples of low-quality webpages for raters to appropriately flag, which can include misleading information, unexpected offensive results, hoaxes and unsupported conspiracy theories."

Once again, Gomes employs inflammatory rhetoric without explaining the objective basis upon which negative evaluations of web sites are based.

Using the input of these "evaluators," Gomes declares that Google has "improved our evaluation methods and made algorithmic updates to surface more authoritative content." He again asserts, further down, "We've adjusted our signals to help surface more authoritative pages and demote low-quality content."

What this means, concretely, is that Google decides not only what political views it wants censored, but also what sites are to be favored.

Gomes is clearly in love with the term “authoritative,” and a study of the word’s meaning explains the nature of his verbal infatuation. A definition given by the Oxford English Dictionary for the word “authoritative” is: “Proceeding from an official source and requiring compliance or obedience.”

The April 25 statement indicates that the censorship protocols will become increasingly restrictive. Gomes states that Google is “making good progress” in making its search results more restrictive. “But in order to have long-term and impactful changes, more structural changes in Search are needed.”

One can assume that Mr. Gomes is a competent programmer and software engineer. But one has good reason to doubt that he has any particular knowledge of, let alone concern for, freedom of speech.

Gomes’s statement is Google-speak for saying that the company does not want people to access anything besides the official narrative, worked out by the government, intelligence agencies, the main capitalist political parties, and transmitted to the population by the corporate-controlled media.

In the course of becoming a massive multi-billion dollar corporate juggernaut, Google has developed politically insidious and dangerous ties to powerful and repressive state agencies. It maintains this relationship not only with the American state, but also with governments overseas. Just a few weeks before implementing its new algorithm, in early April, Gomes met with high-ranking German officials in Berlin to discuss the new censorship protocols.

Google the search engine is now a major force for the imposition of state censorship.

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