

The Privatization of Truth: What Meta's Decision Means for Democracy

Is the embrace of free expression paving the way for manipulation?

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Meta's removal of fact-checkers and embrace of free expression shifts the responsibility for truth from platforms to the public. But does this empower free speech, or does it pave the way for manipulation by the loudest and most aggressive voices?

The Death of Facts

What happens when the loudest liar in the room gets to decide what's true? Thanks to Mark Zuckerberg, we're about to find out.

By scrapping Meta's fact-checking program and shifting to their "roots around free expression," Zuckerberg isn't defending speech — he's unleashing chaos. The guy who profits from outrage has handed the keys of reality to whoever shouts the loudest, no matter how harmful or absurd their claims are.

This is bigger than Facebook or Instagram. It's about what happens when the idea of truth is up for grabs. Should corporations like Meta, motivated by profit and politics, get to play referee? Should governments step in, knowing they've abused that power before? Or are we supposed to accept this dystopian Wild West, where facts are just opinions with better marketing?

Without shared facts, we don't have democracy — we have chaos. Zuckerberg's move is a spineless reaction to political pressure, the kind of decision that lets authoritarians thrive and leaves the rest of us drowning in lies.

Political Pressure Boiling Up

Donald Trump didn't waste a second taking credit for Mark Zuckerberg's decision to scrap Meta's fact-checking program. According to Trump, his own threats to Zuckerberg forced this shift, a move the former and future president gleefully claims as a victory. When a corporation caves to political threats, it doesn't look like free expression — it looks like corporate America kneeling. Creating that image is exactly why Ann Telnaes left the Jeff Bezos-owned *Washington Post* just a few days ago. Seeing her [cartoon](#) is quite poignant.

Zuckerberg would have you believe this is all about principle. In his [carefully worded announcement](#), he framed the decision as a

return to Meta's "roots" of free expression, claiming restrictions on speech had become "out of touch with mainstream discourse."

But let's call it what it really is: a spineless capitulation dressed up as high-minded idealism. This isn't about freedom — it's about survival in a political landscape where Meta knows which side is holding the megaphone.

Zuckerberg didn't wake up one day with a renewed commitment to First Amendment values. He's running a business, and his product isn't free speech — it's engagement. Outrage sells, and Trump is a goldmine.

By gutting fact-checking and amplifying the loudest, angriest voices, Meta is doubling down on what drives clicks and keeps people glued to their feeds. This isn't a reluctant pivot; it's a calculated business move. Trump is good for business, and Zuckerberg is cashing in.

Zuckerberg wants us to believe this decision is a noble return to the marketplace of ideas, but let's not forget how Meta's algorithms work. Free expression doesn't mean everyone gets an equal voice — it means the most incendiary content rises to the top. Lies, conspiracy theories, and outright propaganda are amplified because they generate more engagement. Zuckerberg can wax poetic about free speech all he wants, but the reality is that Meta profits from chaos, not conversation.

Meta announced it's moving its trust and safety operations from California to Texas. On paper, it's a logistical shift, but symbolically, it's a full-blown political statement. Texas is a Republican stronghold, a state that has been at the forefront of pushing anti-censorship laws aimed at social media platforms. Relocating what's left of the moderation teams to Texas isn't just about cheaper office space — it's about appeasing the right and signaling that Meta is willing to play ball.

Critics might argue that Meta is a private company and has every right to make decisions that align with its business interests. That's true, but let's not pretend those decisions exist in a vacuum. When

a company as influential as Meta makes a move like this, the ripple effects extend far beyond its bottom line.

By caving to political pressure and gutting its fact-checking program, Meta is setting a dangerous precedent. It's telling the world that truth is negotiable, that political threats can dictate corporate policy, and that outrage is a commodity to be bought and sold.

Some will defend Zuckerberg's decision by pointing to the challenges of moderating content at scale. It's true that fact-checking is an imperfect and expensive process, and mistakes are inevitable. But abandoning the effort entirely isn't a solution — it's a surrender. It's one thing to admit that fact-checking isn't perfect; it's another to scrap it altogether and replace it with a free-for-all. This isn't a move toward freedom — it's a move toward anarchy.

Others might argue that government regulation of truth is the real threat, citing fears of censorship and authoritarian overreach. And they're not wrong to be cautious. No one wants a world where the government decides what's true and what isn't.

But we're already living in a world where private companies like Meta decide that. Zuckerberg's claim of free expression is a smokescreen for what's really happening — he's privatizing truth and selling it.

Zuckerberg's decision isn't just a failure of corporate ethics — it's a failure of imagination. Instead of innovating ways to balance free expression with accountability, Meta has chosen the path of least resistance. Instead of standing firm against political pressure, it has chosen to kneel. And instead of fostering a platform where ideas can be debated in good faith, it has chosen to profit from the noise.

Who Polices Truth?

If truth becomes a matter of opinion, what the hell are we even arguing about anymore? This is the heart of the problem. Without a shared foundation of facts, we're not debating — we're shouting into the void, hoping the other side shuts up before we do. And that's exactly where we are now. The internet, with its infinite echo

chambers, has turned us into tribes armed with our own “facts,” fighting battles that have no winners, only louder losers.

Platforms like Facebook and Fox News have perfected the art of isolating people in ideological bubbles. For Boomers scrolling Facebook, every meme screams that the world is on fire, that their way of life is under siege, and that the truth is whatever their favorite pundit says it is.

Echo chambers distort reality. They create worlds where facts are optional, and opinions masquerade as truths. It’s not just dangerous — it’s exhausting.

If all you want to do is argue, fine. I’m a lawyer; I like to argue, too. But I also like to get somewhere, to find a solution. If you’re just yelling to feel superior or piss someone off, congratulations — you’ve achieved nothing.

The truth isn’t supposed to be subjective. It’s a set of shared, objective facts that we can all agree on as a baseline. Without that, democracy falls apart. If we’re all living in separate realities, how do we legislate, govern, or even have a conversation? The answer is, we don’t. Chaos takes over.

Now we’re stuck with three poor options: Free speech absolutism, corporate control, or government regulation. Let’s break down why each one is flawed, and why ignoring the problem is the worst option of all.

Free Speech Absolutism: The Wild West Internet

Elon Musk calls himself a free speech absolutist, and X (formerly Twitter) is his grand experiment. No moderation, no accountability, just a digital Thunderdome where the loudest voices dominate.

But it’s a fantasy that ignores how power dynamics actually work. In a world where anger and outrage drive engagement, the loudest voices — often the most harmful — dominate. Proponents argue this ensures everyone has a voice, but not all voices are amplified equally. Algorithms, not principles, decide whose free speech gets heard.

Supporters of the Wild West internet often say, “It’s up to individuals to separate fact from fiction.” But that assumes an equal playing field, one where people have the tools and media literacy to discern truth from propaganda. They don’t. Misinformation spreads faster and hits harder than the truth ever could.

Corporate Regulation of Truth: Zuckerberg’s Dystopia

Some argue we should just let the platforms decide, pointing out that companies like Meta have both the resources and the responsibility to police misinformation. But can we really trust corporations, whose primary goal is profit, to act in the public interest? History suggests otherwise. Meta’s algorithms maximize engagement, not truth. Lies and outrage generate clicks, and clicks make money.

Defenders of corporate regulation claim companies can operate independently, free from political or financial pressures. But when companies like Meta bend to political winds and profit motives, they become arbiters of truth in name only. They’re not protecting speech — they’re protecting their bottom line.

For years, people complained Twitter was too liberal. Nearly overnight, Musk changed that by removing moderation and changing the algorithm. Facebook starts from a more conservative position and only time will tell if it ends up like one of the chans.

Government Oversight: The ‘Truth Stick’ Problem

Government regulation of truth is perhaps the most polarizing option. On the one hand, governments can establish baseline standards for combating misinformation, ensuring platforms are held accountable for harm. On the other hand, history shows that when governments control the narrative, censorship and propaganda flourish.

Critics rightly fear authoritarian overreach: What happens when truth becomes a political tool? It’s a valid concern, especially in polarized democracies or under authoritarian regimes. But rejecting government involvement entirely is just as dangerous.

Regulation doesn't have to mean handing the truth to bureaucrats. It can mean enforcing transparency and accountability while leaving editorial control to independent bodies. The challenge lies in designing systems that protect speech without enabling abuse.

A Mix of All Three Solutions

No single solution can address the erosion of truth, but a combination of approaches could offer a path forward. Here's what that might look like:

1. **Corporate Accountability:** Platforms like Meta must take responsibility for the consequences of their algorithms. This doesn't mean they define truth but that they create tools to curb the spread of misinformation. Transparency is key: Platforms should be required to disclose how content is prioritized and provide users with clear, accessible ways to challenge harmful content.
2. **Targeted Government Regulation:** Governments should enforce baseline standards for platform accountability, such as requiring companies to flag or remove demonstrably false claims (e.g., disinformation about public health). Importantly, regulation should focus on transparency, not editorial control. Independent bodies — not government agencies — should oversee enforcement to prevent censorship.
3. **Media Literacy Education:** Individuals must be empowered to navigate the modern information landscape. This means integrating media literacy into education systems globally, teaching people how to evaluate sources, recognize biases, and identify misinformation. Platforms could also play a role by funding public campaigns to promote critical thinking.

Why is this mix the best option? Because it recognizes the complexity of the problem without surrendering to it.

It's not a perfect system — no system is. But it's a step toward re-establishing a shared reality, one where truth isn't just another commodity.

The Uncomfortable Truth

None of these solutions are perfect, and frankly, they all kind of suck. But pretending the problem doesn't exist is a recipe for disaster. Ignoring it won't make it go away; it'll only make it worse. We're already living in a world where facts are under attack and losing, where echo chambers thrive, and where the truth is a battleground.

So, what's the answer? Honestly, I don't know. But what I do know is this: without shared realities, we have nothing.

And that's the biggest irony of all. We're spending so much time fighting over who gets to define the truth that we're forgetting what's really at stake: the ability to argue, to debate, to find solutions at all. Because once the truth is gone, so is everything else.