



## DuckDuckGo Bows to Authoritarians, Begins Censoring Search Engine Results to “Fight Disinformation”

### Description

Arguably the world’s most popular private search engine, DuckDuckGo, has long been a haven for those who do not want to participate in Google’s censorship, manipulation, and tracking. In 2008, Gabriel Weinberg started this mission with an emphasis on protecting searchers’ privacy and avoiding the filter bubble of personalized search results that comes with all things Google.

Since its inception, the pro-privacy and anti-tracking business model has propelled the company from just a couple hundred thousand searches a month to over 100,000,000 searches every day. Their growth has been nearly exponential. But that all may be changing now.

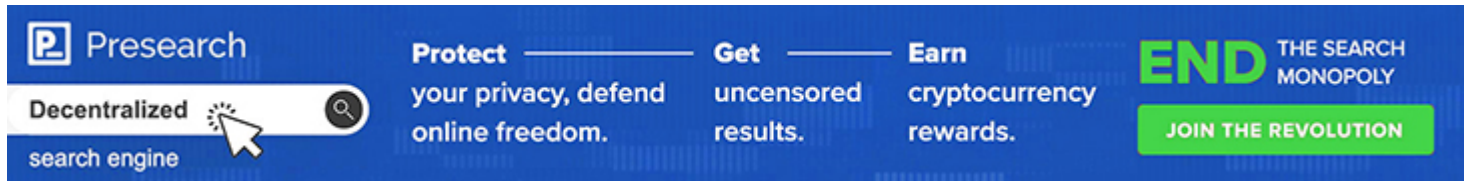
This week, Weinberg, took everything his organization had been working on for years, and flushed it down the toilet with a single [tweet](#).

Like so many others I am sickened by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the gigantic humanitarian crisis it continues to create. [#StandWithUkraine?](#) At DuckDuckGo, we’ve been rolling out search updates that down-rank sites associated with Russian disinformation.

While this may seem like a noble gesture, as the Russian invasion of Ukraine *is* an unlawful and horrific invasion, the idea of a search engine which prides itself as anti-censorship and pro-privacy turning to the dark side and hiding information from its users, is not appealing to those who actually stand by these principles.

Moreover, who gets to decide what exactly constitutes “disinformation?” In his thread, in which he engaged with several users, Weinberg said nothing of transparency. Nor did he elaborate on what is and what isn’t disinformation or who would be telling DuckDuckGo what to censor.

If anything the last two years, and especially the last three weeks, have shown us that today's disinformation is the [next day's reality](#) and [vice versa](#). So many stories have been called disinformation only to be proven true months later while, at the same time, overt disinformation has been presented as fact only to be proven false down the road.

A blue banner advertisement for Presearch. On the left, the Presearch logo is followed by the text 'Decentralized search engine' and a magnifying glass icon. In the center, three columns of text read: 'Protect your privacy, defend online freedom.', 'Get uncensored results.', and 'Earn cryptocurrency rewards.'. On the right, the word 'END' is in large green letters, followed by 'THE SEARCH MONOPOLY' and a green button that says 'JOIN THE REVOLUTION'.

Case in point: Snake Island and the Ghost of Kyiv. The Ghost of Kyiv story was an inspiring tale of a single Ukrainian fighter pilot who took out multiple Russian aircraft. It was pushed by the president and multiple officials from Ukraine. The only thing was, it was fake, or rather “disinformation” as Weinberg would say.

As the NY Times reported, while there are [reports](#) of some Russian planes that were destroyed in combat, there is no information linking them to a single Ukrainian pilot. One of the first videos that went viral, which was included in the montage shared by the official Ukraine Twitter account, was a computer rendering from [a combat flight simulator](#) originally uploaded by a YouTube user with just 3,000 subscribers. And a photo supposedly confirming the [fighter's existence](#), shared by a former president of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, was from a 2019 [Twitter post](#) by the Ukrainian defense ministry.

“Ukraine is involved in pretty classic propaganda,” [said](#) Laura Edelson, a computer scientist studying misinformation at New York University. “They are telling stories that support their narrative. Sometimes false information is making its way in there, too, and more of it is getting through because of the overall environment.”

Even Snopes, who loves to spin “fact checks” to paint their political enemies in a negative light, was forced to report on this incident. However, in true Snopes fashion, they refused to label it “false” and instead claimed that the video — that was a computer simulation and put out by the Ukrainian government to intentionally deceive — was merely [“miscaptioned.”](#)

There was also the story of Snake Island, in which President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine personally announced the deaths of soldiers allegedly killed by Russian troops, only to announce later that no such attack happened and all the men who were “killed,” were [actually alive](#).

Make no mistake, Russia is also involved in a heavy propaganda campaign. They have [been caught](#) lying about Ukrainians bombing hospitals and indiscriminately killing civilians. They have also been caught stoking multiple fears of “false flags” which never happened and were used as a pretext to invade Ukraine.

Misinformation and disinformation have long been tools in both starting and during conflicts. Americans should know this the most, as we've been led in to multiple wars based on lies started by politicians and echoed by mainstream media.

Remember Iraqi troops throwing babies on the ground — a premise to justify the beginning of the Gulf War — which never actually happened? What about [weapons of mass destruction, the Gulf of Tonkin, or Bashar al-Assad gassing his own people?](#) This disinformation led to the suffering and deaths of millions of innocent people and the folks who spread it are the main voices behind a new era of censorship.

Unfortunately, many folks don't care that they are being lied to — in fact, they want it.

"Why can't we just let people believe some things?" one Twitter user replied in the Ghost of Kyiv thread, receiving hundreds of likes. "If the Russians believe it, it brings fear. If the Ukrainians believe it, it gives them hope."

Even the [NY Times weighed in](#) and said that Ukraine needs these lies to "keep morale high among the fighters and marshal global support for their cause."

While morale is certainly important to keeping troops engaged in battle, what happens when the truth comes out? What happens to morale when thousands of "troops," including yours truly, invade a country or carry out an act based on disinformation only to find out later you were lied to? It devastates you, that's what happens.

So, while Weinberg may think he is on the righteous path by limiting search results which favor a particular side in this conflict, this will only lead to more ignorance, more close-mindedness, and more suffering.

Censorship never has and never will be used by anyone other than authoritarian regimes. It has never worked and never will work to create anything but ignorance and faith in tyrants. It reflects society's lack of confidence in itself and is but a stepping stone on the path to totalitarianism.

As the famous German poet Heinrich Heine reminds us, "Where they have burned books, they will end in burning human beings."

By Matt Agorist

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