

Watch Sacha Baron Cohen skewer Zuckerberg's 'twisted logic' on hate speech and fakes

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 **Image Credits:** Saul Loeb / AFP / Getty Images

Comedian Sacha Baron Cohen has waded into the debate about social media regulation.

In an award-acceptance speech to the Anti-Defamation League yesterday, the creator of Ali G and Borat delivered a precision take-down of what he called Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg's "bullshit" arguments against regulating his platform.

The speech is well worth watching in full as Cohen articulates, with a comic's truth-telling clarity, the problem with "the greatest propaganda machine in history" (aka social media platform giants) and how to fix it: Broadcast-style regulation that sets basic standards and practices of what content isn't acceptable for them to amplify to billions.



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/ymaWq5yZIYM>

“There is such a thing as objective truth,” said Cohen. “Facts do exist. And if these internet companies really want to make a difference, they should hire enough monitors to actually monitor, work closely with groups like the ADL and the NAACP, insist on facts and purge these lies and conspiracies from their platforms.”

Attacking social media platforms for promulgating “a sewer of bigotry and vile conspiracy theories that threaten our democracy and to some degree our planet,” he pointed out that freedom of speech is not the same as freedom of reach.

“This can’t possibly be what the creators of the internet had in mind,” he said. “I believe that’s it’s time for a fundamental rethink of social media and how it spreads hate, conspiracies and lies.”

“Voltaire was right. Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities — and social media lets authoritarians push absurdities to billions of people,” he added.

Cohen also rubbished Zuckerberg’s recent speech at Georgetown University in which the Facebook founder sought to appropriate the mantle of “free speech” to argue against social media regulation.

“This is not about limiting anyone’s free speech. This is about giving people — including some of the most reprehensible people in history — the biggest platform in history to reach a third of the planet.”

"We are not asking these companies to determine the boundaries of free speech across society, we just want them to be responsible on their platforms," Cohen added.

On Facebook's decision to stick by its morally bankrupt position of allowing politicians to pay it to spread lying, hatefully propaganda, Cohen also had this to say: "Under this twisted logic if Facebook were around in the 1930s it would have allowed Hitler to post 30-second ads on his solution to the 'Jewish problem.' "

Ouch.

YouTube also came in for criticism during the speech, including for its engagement-driven algorithmic recommendation engine which Cohen pointed out had single-handedly recommended videos by conspiracist Alex Jones "billions of times."

Just six people decide what information "so much of the world sees," he noted, name-checking the "silicon six" — as he called Facebook's Zuckerberg, Google's Sundar Pichai, Alphabet's Larry Page and Sergey Brin, YouTube's Susan Wojcicki and Twitter's Jack Dorsey.

"All billionaires, all Americans, who care more about boosting their share price than about protecting democracy. This is ideological imperialism," he went on. "Six unelected individuals in Silicon Valley imposing their vision on the rest of the world, unaccountable to any government and acting like they're above the reach of law.

"It's like we're living in the Roman Empire and Mark Zuckerberg is Caesar. At least that would explain his haircut."

Cohen ended the speech with an appeal for societies to "prioritize truth over lies, tolerance over prejudice, empathy over indifference, and experts over ignoramuses" and thereby save democracy from the greed of "high tech robber barons."