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Japan's Right-wing YouTubers: Finding a Niche in an Environment of Increased Censorship*

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In recent years, online hate speech has gained considerable attention and some tech companies have attempted to regulate the behavior of internet users. One notable example is YouTube, the world's most popular video sharing website, which enacted new policies in 2017 to censor content it considered racist or hateful. This paper examines how this situation played out for Japan-based YouTube content creators. It looks at the videos and the viewer communities surrounding two very popular right-wing YouTube channels: Nihon Bunka Channel Sakura and Black Pigeon Speaks.

Both Nihon Bunka Channel Sakura and Black Pigeon Speaks carefully tread the line between what is acceptable and unacceptable under YouTube's rules, avoiding the use of language that could be considered outright hate speech. They also embraced online crowdfunding—which draws upon the contributions of individual viewers—as an alternative to relying on traditional advertising revenue. Amid the growth of private regulation that attempts to silence online hate speech and far right content creators, these two channels have built and maintained loyal communities of viewers, allowing them to survive and thrive. This raises questions about whether YouTube and other private internet companies can effectively regulate undesirable speech on their platforms.

Key words YouTube, Alt-Right, nationalism, Japan, hate speech

I. Introduction

In August 2017, the New York Times Magazine published an article declaring that YouTube had become the "new talk radio" for the "new far right." It described the emergence of a community that it called the "YouTube Right:"

> "This community takes the form of a loosely associated group of channels

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> and personalities, connected mostly by shared political instincts and aesthetic sensibilities. They are monologists, essayists, performers and vloggers who publish frequent dispatches from their living rooms, their studios or the field, inveighing vigorously against the political left and mocking the 'mainstream media,' against which they are defined and empowered. They deplore 'social justice warriors,' whom they credit with ruining popular culture, conspiring against the populace and helping to undermine 'the West.' They are fixated on the subjects of immigration, Islam and political correctness. They seem at times more animated by President Trump's opponents than by the man himself, with whom they share many priorities, if not a style. Some of their leading figures are associated with larger media companies, like Alex Jones' Infowars or Ezra Levant's Rebel Media. Others are independent operators who found their voices in the medium" (Herrman, 2017).

Although the New York Times mainly focused on English language content creators who were based in North America, the above description, with a few names changed, could be applied to other countries around the world. YouTube and other social media sites have made it easier than ever for alternative media outlets and amateur journalists to create and share their work. The "YouTube Right" doesn't just exist within the context of Donald Trump and American conservatism – it is an international phenomenon.

This article will discuss right-leaning YouTubers who are based in Japan. Like their counterparts in North America, they create videos that depict the activities of the political left as a threat to national identity, culture, and civilization. Their videos, which often fixate on perceived threats posed by certain racial and ethnic minorities, could be classified by many as "hate speech." Similar to the North American YouTube Right, they realize that new hate speech laws or YouTube community guidelines could be used to censor their videos. There is fear among that they could be "doomed to be banned, delisted or stripped of lucrative ads, effectively diminishing their presence on the platform" (Ibid).

This fear is not entirely unfounded – as this article will go on to explain, YouTube has taken measures to diminish the presence of content creators who create hateful videos, especially right-leaning YouTubers. Yet, despite years of such policies, the YouTube Right still exits as a large niche community. Some channels have continued to grow in popularity as YouTube apparently struggles to prevent its platform from being used to

advance hateful messages.[1] Two such YouTube channels will be discussed in this paper: Nihon Bunka Channel Sakura and the Black Pigeon Speaks.

The first, Nihon Bunka Channel Sakura ("Japanese Culture Channel Sakura" – hereafter referred to by the shortened form of its name, "Channel Sakura") is a fully-fledged alternative media organization that acts as a voice of Japan's assertive conservative right. Although it operates out of a studio newsroom in Tokyo, its news reports are not televised: it reaches its viewers through the internet. Much of its programming is distributed for free via YouTube and NicoNico Douga (a Japanese video sharing site). Programs are almost exclusively in the Japanese language and targeted at a domestic audience within Japan.

The second channel, the Black Pigeon Speaks (henceforth referred to as "BPS"), is a much smaller operation. It is similar to Channel Sakura in its use of the YouTube platform and its right-leaning outlook, but is different in almost every other respect. It is a political commentary channel focused around a single individual – a Canadian/American man living in Tokyo, its videos are in English, and it is aimed at an international audience. While a few of BPS' videos are Japan-related, the majority of the channel's videos are commentary on the political and social conditions in Western nations.

Both channels have thrived on YouTube, finding audiences that number in the hundreds of thousands. YouTube has served as a platform to help these content creators spread their political views, while also allowing them to financially prosper. However, these channels exist in a perilous state. In mid-2017 YouTube's administrators launched a strict campaign against hateful and racist content on their site, by deleting, demonetizing, or restricting viewer access to videos deemed to be in violation of new community guidelines. Both Channel Sakura and BPS function in a grey area, advancing viewpoints towards religious or ethnic groups that arguably fuel hatred towards those groups. Channel Sakura can be linked to hateful Japanese nationalist groups, while BPS can be linked to the so-called "Alt-Right." As such, it is conceivable that YouTube could crack down on both

[1] YouTube content is divided into "channels" – pages that host all videos uploaded by a particular user. In some cases, channels function like traditional television channels – with professional studios, camera operators, writers, and people who appear in the videos. The vast majority, however, are amateur video channels, often created and operated by a single person.

channels, and in the case of BPS, it has already demonetized and restricted access to several videos.

For a content creator to make a living off of YouTube, two things are necessary: reaching a large audience and generating monetary income from that audience. YouTube's community guidelines and its restrictive advertising policies make it very difficult for creators of politically controversial content to achieve both, especially if that content could be classified as inciting hate. Yet, despite this, both Channel Sakura and BPS have survived and thrived on YouTube.

How can this be? This paper examines this phenomenon by first introducing background information on private regulation of online hate speech and YouTube's attempts at such regulation. It then explores the cases of Channel Sakura and BPS, noting how both channels have created content that delicately fall within YouTube's community guidelines while still appealing to a far-right audience. It will also examine how both channels have generated monetary income through community-based collective actions that bypass YouTube's built-in advertising system, allowing them to make a living without fear of demonetization. In its final section, it will discuss the limitations of private censorship of hateful content.

II. Private Regulation of Hate Speech & YouTube

Online hate speech presents a considerable challenge to national lawmakers and government regulators. The World Wide Web is, as its name suggests, an international entity, hosting websites in different countries that operate under different legal approaches to freedom of speech and hate speech. This has made the internet an ideal tool for those who seek to bypass their countries' traditional limitations on speech, from political dissidents to extremists who seek to spread hateful ideology. People who would face restrictions in their home countries are capable of turning to platforms hosted on servers in other countries, far from the reach of local authorities.

Michael Meyerson noted in 1994 that technology was bringing about the birth of new private networks that would be difficult for governments

to regulate, and although he did not mention the concept of online hate speech, Meyerson theorized that there would be a need for "virtual constitutions" to promote the general welfare of network users (Meyerson 1994). More recently, Kreimer has argued that government incapability to deal with harmful speech on the internet requires shifting the responsibility to private internet companies, which act "as proxy censors to control the flow of information" (Kreimer, 2006). On a similar note, James Banks has stated that "the global nature of the Internet makes the total legal regulation of cyberspace impossible," and that the best solution to online hate speech would be to use a combination of governmental and private regulation to "minimize" the impact of hate speech. As examples, Banks mentioned how private software and web hosting companies could require customers to agree to specific terms of use when signing up for services. If those agreements contained strict limitations on the use of those platforms for purposes of hate, the companies in question could censor hate speech, even if their servers were located within countries that have few legal limitations on hate speech (Banks, 2010).

In the real world, social networking and video hosting sites that cater to users in many different countries have attempted to police negative user behavior, including the use of hate speech, through the creation of user agreements. Most major social media websites and website hosting companies now require users to agree to specific terms before creating accounts to post or upload content, and these terms often include conditions under which the website administrators can censor or delete content that is considered undesirable. These private agreements between users and companies have come to mimic the language of constitutions, reflecting the idea that "the consequent counteractions that state-centric constitutional instruments are able to provide are challenged by the global nature of the social media environment and by the emergence of private corporations as dominant transnational actors" (Celeste, 2018). Or, in other words, these agreements exist apart from the national laws of countries, and in the case of very large content hosting websites, they function as transnational regulations on freedom of expression.

This paper focuses on the results of private regulatory efforts by YouTube, the largest video sharing site in the world, and its impact on certain video content creators. YouTube is an American subsidiary of

Google/Alphabet, but it hosts and serves up video content for millions of people around the world. Its headquarters exists in America, where the U.S. Constitution protects speech that could be outlawed in other countries, including speech that incites hatred towards racial/ethnic/religious groups. Since its founding in 2005, YouTube allowed users to post a wide variety of content, including videos containing hate speech. This situation mirrored the policies of similar America-based social media sites, reflecting "a libertarian, content-neutral ethos" in keeping with American expectations that freedom of expression should be treated like a "marketplace of ideas" (Syned 2017).

Eventually this put YouTube in conflict with national governments that demanded that it comply with local anti-hate speech laws. As a solution to this issue, YouTube often placed such videos under geographical restrictions. This meant that a video containing, for example, Nazi imagery and Nazi German music would not be accessible to viewers from Germany, while being accessible to Americans who browsed YouTube. However, this country-based blocking was not particularly effective. It could be easily bypassed through rather simple methods that spoof the location of a visitor (How to Bypass YouTube's Regional Filter, 2017). Those that truly wanted to view the videos in question could do so.

III. Hate Speech in Japan

Article 21 of the Constitution of Japan guarantees freedom of expression and bans government censorship of speech. For much of Japan's postwar history, the government has taken a "laissez-faire approach to regulating speech and speech-related activities," reflecting Japan's "embrace of free expression as a necessary incident of democracy" (Krotoszynski, 2009). Under such legal conditions, Japanese authorities largely ignored speech that could be categorized as incitement to racial discrimination and hatred. That situation changed in the early 2010's, when new extremist groups gained public attention for their overt use of racially hateful language in public demonstrations.

The most notable of these groups was *Zainichi Tokken wo Yurusanai Shimin no Kai* (the "Association of Citizens against the Special Privileges of the Zainichi",

henceforth referred to its shortened name, "Zaitokukai"), an anti-Korean extremist hate group founded in 2007. Zaitokukai's demonstrations, many of which had been videotaped and spread through the internet, drew the attention of the Japanese media and human rights activists. Growing international attention of this issue led Tessa Morris-Suzuki to observe that Japan's attempts to portray itself internationally as a supporter of democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights were being undermined by the perception that "democracy is left impoverished when freedom of hate speech is protected more zealously than freedom of reasoned political debate" (Morris-Suzuki, 2013).

Although Japan did not have clear laws against hate speech, the targets of Zaitokukai's demonstrations nonetheless attempted to use Japan's legal system to fight back. The Kyoto No.1 Korean Elementary School, which was a target of Zaitokukai demonstrations in 2009 and 2010, filed a civil lawsuit against the demonstrators, and the Kyoto District Court ruled in its favor in 2013 (Fackler, 2013). In absence of domestic laws against racial discrimination or hate speech, the court ordered Zaitokukai members to pay a fine based on the fact that their actions "constituted racial discrimination" in violation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), a United Nations convention of which Japan was a signatory.

Despite the monetary fine from the Kyoto District Court decision, similar anti-Korean and anti-Chinese demonstrations continued to be held in Japan. Responding to reports on this situation, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and UN Human Rights Committee urged the Japanese government to regulate hate speech by law (Japan Times, 2016). The issue was eventually taken up by Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party, which passed the Hate Speech Elimination Act of 2016, a law that officially defined the concept of "unfair discriminatory speech and behavior" as something that should be dealt with in the spirit of the Japanese Constitution and ICERD. However, as noted by Kotani (2017), the law lays out "abstract obligations on the part of the national and local governments to implement measures to eliminate unfair discriminatory speech and behavior" without criminally prohibiting such speech and behavior, making it a "principle law, which does nothing more than declare the basic principles for confronting a complex issue." Despite the fact that

the 2016 law did not contain any criminal prohibitions, it has been used by local authorities in the city of Kawasaki to justify denying protest permits and the use of public facilities to anti-Korean extremist groups (Mainichi Shimbun, 2017).

The above-mentioned examples of regulating hate speech involved cases that took place outside of the internet, in which victims were directly confronted by protest groups entering communities and expressing hatred in a loud and direct manner. Communities such as Kawasaki managed to block some demonstrations through local regulations, but such regulations could not be applied to online hate speech. One does not need to apply for a protest permit or use public facilities when posting hatred in the virtual world. If specific persons or organizations are the target of defamatory or harassing statements by internet users, the perpetrators could be fined, but online expressions of hatred and racism directed at an indefinite number of people, such as "Korean residents of Japan," are not legally prohibited in Japan (Mainichi Shimbun, 2018).

Since the 2016 law did not prohibit online hate speech, sites such as YouTube did not take aggressive actions to delete and block content that some considered unfair discriminatory speech. However, despite the lack of strict hate speech laws in Japan, events in another part of the world would cause a major shift in YouTube policy and eventually lead to the censorship of numerous Japanese videos hosted by the site.

IV. The Growth of Private Censorship

The 2016 election of Donald Trump led many mainstream media outlets to focus on pro-Trump online media, including "fake news" sites and hate-filled media from the so-called "Alt-Right." Many such alternative media was hosted on social networks owned by major corporations: Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube – all of which rely on advertising for income.

In the case of YouTube, it became apparent to journalists that the creators of extreme right media were profiting from the site's built-in commercial advertising system. In early 2017, the Wall Street Journal published a series of articles noting that YouTube's advertising system was playing commercials from large corporations such as Coca Cola and

Amazon on videos containing racist, homophobic, and other hateful content (Nicas, 2017). Facing the possibility of having their brands associated with hate, many prominent corporations and advertising firms pulled their ad campaigns from YouTube.

After taking this financial blow and noting the increased concern about hateful content, YouTube enacted new measures to counteract the situation. The result was a revision to the site's internal rules, laying out new restrictions on the freedoms it granted to content creators and users. It included new community guidelines against "hateful" and ""incendiary and demeaning" content were:

> *"**Hateful content**: Content that promotes discrimination or disparages or humiliates an individual or group of people on the basis of the individual's or group's race, ethnicity, or ethnic origin, nationality, religion, disability, age, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other characteristic associated with systematic discrimination or marginalization.*
> ***Incendiary and demeaning content**: Content that is gratuitously incendiary, inflammatory, or demeaning. For example, video content that uses gratuitously disrespectful language that shames or insults an individual or group"* (Spangler 2017).

Prior to this policy change, users could freely host racist and hateful content on YouTube without much fear of reprisal, so it represented a major shift. Serious violations would be subject to removal from the site, while other videos that violated guidelines faced demonetization or de-indexing from YouTube search results – in effect a quarantine (Ibid).

The guidelines were enforced through a new algorithm that automatically detected whether a video was at risk of containing potentially offensive content. The algorithm was extremely strict, flagging millions of videos, including many that did not contain anything remotely close to hate speech. The result, according to many YouTubers, was an "Adpocalypse" – in a matter of days, popular YouTubers who had made a living through YouTube's advertising system were making only a tiny fraction of what they had made earlier (Kain, 2017).

Some of the hardest hit YouTubers were conservative political commentators. In addition to having their videos demonetized, many of them experienced having their videos placed in restrictive mode –

preventing the videos from showing up in search results and not allowing user comments. Some have accused YouTube of political bias, claiming that YouTube's guidelines are being interpreted to make "basic conservative ideas" inappropriate and subject to censorship (Weingarten, 2017). Prager University, a popular YouTube channel headed by conservative talk radio host Dennis Prager, filed a lawsuit against YouTube and Google, arguing that the companies were unlawfully restricting the right to freedom of speech. According to Dennis Prager, YouTube was "engaging in an arbitrary and capricious use of their 'restricted mode' and 'demonetization' to restrict non-left political thought. Their censorship is profoundly damaging because Google and YouTube own and control the largest forum for public participation in video-based speech in not only California, but the United States, and the world" (PragerU, 2017). Among right-leaning YouTubers, there was a general sense that Google, as well as many other corporations that own social media platforms, were politically biased and seeking to censor conservative voices.

YouTube also cracked down on content creators in Japan. Some popular right-leaning Japanese YouTubers, such as Kazuya Channel and Boukoku no Aegis, made videos revealing that YouTube had demonetized their channels because they created videos that were deemed hateful towards Koreans or Chinese (Kaneko, 2017). Later, in May 2018, users of the Japanese bulletin board 5channel organized a "ban festival," coming together to send YouTube reports about videos they considered to be in violation of the site's community guidelines. The "ban festival" achieved many of its goals – several popular right-wing Japanese YouTube channels and thousands of videos were deleted from the site (Harbor Business Online, 2018).

V. Channel Sakura

Channel Sakura is an alternative media platform that represents Japan's assertive conservative right, a segment of the Japanese population that find value in a worldview that treat's Japan's colonial conduct and participation in World War II as something worthy of pride, attack critics of Japan's historical conduct, and view Korea and China with suspicious/hostility (Togo, 2010).

Since its start in 2004, Channel Sakura has been headed by Mizushima Satoru, a filmmaker with decades of experience in television production and social ties to conservative political activists. Although Mizushima is the central figure on the channel and appears in most of its videos, Channel Sakura acts as a conduit through which various Japanese right-wing figures can present and discuss various viewpoints.

It is in effect a gathering place of the who's who of Japan's right. Notable figures listed on Channel Sakura's website as supporters include:

- Ijiri Kazuo (professor emeritus of Japanese culture at Takushoku University, member of Tsukurukai, board member of Nippon Kaigi)
- Itagaki Tadashi (former National Diet lawmaker [LDP], head secretary of Japan War-Bereaved Families Association, board member of Nippon Kaigi)
- Ito Tetsuo (policy board director for Nippon Kaigi, a standing director of the Friends of Lee Teng-Hui Association in Japan)
- Endo Tomeji(President of Nisshin Houdou publishing company)
- Odamura Shiro (former President of Takushoku University, president of the Friends of Lee Teng-Hui Association in Japan, vice-president of Nippon Kaigi)
- Kase Hideaki (Board member of Nippon Kaigi, board member of Society for Dissemination of Historical Fact, supporter of Tsukurukai)
- Kabajima Yuzo (Secretary General of Nippon Kaigi)
- Kubota Nobuyuki (former Professor of philosophy of education at Gakushuin Women's College, director of Friends of Lee Teng-Hui Association in Japan)
- Ko Bunyu (Professor of Japanese culture at Takushoku University, standing director of Friends of Lee Teng-Hui Association in Japan)
- Suzuki Akio (Retired General & Chief of Staff of ASDF, board member of Kawasaki Heavy Industries)
- Fujioka Nobukatsu (Professor of education at Tokyo University, founder of Tsukurukai)
- Yamaguchi Munetoshi – (Yasukuni Shrine Reverence Association)
- Yuhara Masataka - (Friends of Lee Teng-Hui Association in Japan)
- Watanabe Shoichi – (Professor at Sophia University)

It is an impressive list of intellectuals, activists, military, and business figures, representing a cross section of the assertive conservative right. Several major organizations are present:

- Nippon Kaigi ("Japan Conference"): the largest conservative political organization in Japan

- Tsukurukai – ("Atarashii Rekishi Kyoukasho wo Tsukurukai" / "Japanese Society for Textbook Reform") notable for igniting a diplomatic storm through its creation of a right-leaning history textbook for Japanese schools.
- The Friends of Lee Teng-Hui Association – an organization of Japanese conservatives who favor Taiwanese independence and view mainland China as a threat

Social connections to these individuals and the organizations they represent are of great use to Channel Sakura. It often relies on such individuals to provide political commentary or promote activist campaigns. Likewise, these individuals can benefit from increased attention to their organizations. Individuals on the above list, along with various affiliated organizations, often participated in demonstrations organized by Ganbare Nippon ("Let's Go Japan"), a group led by Mizushima that is in effect the offline activist wing of Channel Sakura.

VI. Content & Popularity: Channel Sakura

On YouTube.com, Channel Sakura uploads videos under the account name SakuraSoTV. As of December 26, 2017, its channel had 224,882 subscribers and a tgotal of 285,397,400 total views of 20,186 uploaded videos. This means that Channel Sakura videos received an average of about 14,100 views per video.

There are many videos that have considerably more than twelve thousand views, and some that have much less. The five most-viewed videos of all time are (from December 26, 2017):

1. 【黄文雄】日本人とはこんなに違う中国人と韓国人[桜H24/10/19] (*Ko Bunyu – Japanese People Are Really Different From Chinese and Koreans*) October 19, 2012 – 811,093 views – A video in which the reasonable Japanese people are compared to irrational and rude Chinese and Koreans

2. 1/5【報道特番】パチンコで壊れる日本[桜H23/2/12] (*Special Report: Japan is being destroyed by Pachinko*) February 12, 2009 – 771,662 views – A video exploring the pachinko industry's financial links to North Korea.

3.【海上自衛隊】海上自衛隊最大の護衛艦「いずも」のすべて－その能力に迫る！[桜H27/7/13] (*The Maritime Self-Defense Forces - Looking at all of the capabilities of the MSDF's Largest Escort Vessel, Izumo*) July 14, 2015
721, 301 Views - A video about the Izumo, a new aircraft carrier launched by Japan's naval forces.

4.【井上和彦】韓国軍の実力を徹底分析！[桜H22/6/24] (*Inoue Kazuhiko - Thorough Analysis of South Korea's Real Military Power!*) June 24, 2010 – 635,774 views – A critical evaluation of South Korea's military strength

5.【特別公開】映画「南の島に雪が降る」[桜H25/8/10] (*Special Release - Film: "Snow Falls on the Island in the South")* August 10, 2013 – 581,127 views: A full-length feature film adaptation of the 1961 novel of the same title, based on actor Kato Daisuke's experiences as a soldier in World War II.

Each of the above videos is over 20 minutes in length. Longer videos tend to receive more views, especially if they have a topic that is not specific to a single short-term news story. Each of these five videos was arguably as relevant at the time of this paper's publication as they were a few years earlier. Channel Sakura has uploaded many shorter videos, and many videos that are specific to a single short-term news event. Such videos tend to receive less than 10,000 views.

VII. Channel Sakura's Views on Hate Speech

Since its start, Channel Sakura and Ganbare Nippon have attempted to depict themselves as different from other nationalist organizations in Japan. To achieve this, Mizushima has taken efforts to prevent the use of overt hate speech in Channel Sakura and Ganbare Nippon events.

When asked about Channel Sakura's view on groups like Zaitokukai, Mizushima has said that he absolutely opposed to the use of hate speech and racist language. At events organized by Ganbare Nippon, participants are told they must carry out protests that any Japanese person can be proud of, rather than using base and crude language.

If members of groups such as Zaitokukai want to participate in protest events organized by Channel Sakura and Ganbare Nippon, they can do so

as individuals, following the rules set by Mizushima. However, he refuses to formally cooperate with Zaitokukai. Working together with sound truck right-winger (*gaisen uyoku*) groups is also out of the question.

There are also restrictions on flags at demonstrations. Mizushima says that the national flag of Japan is allowed, but the rising sun flag is not permitted. Although some people associate the rising sun flag with militarism and pre-war Japan, Mizushima does not prevent its use on those grounds. Instead, he sees it as a flag of the Japanese military, so its use in political demonstrations disrespectful to the military (Kuukonuko 2012). In practice, this has prevented their protest events from becoming like those of Zaitokukai, which stand out as shocking due to their frequent use of racist banners, Nazi flags, and rising sun flags.

Channel Sakura has also engaged in discussion of hate speech with its ideological opponents. For example, in November of 2013, Channel Sakura aired a 3-hour program in which Mizushima and a panel of four conservatives discussed and debated with Noma Yasumichi of Counter-Racist Action Collective and three representatives of the Zainichi Korean community. The discussion was civil and generally polite, with both sides sharing a dislike for hate speech, but generally disagreeing about numerous other issues (SakuraSoTV, 2013b).

While he is against the use of hate speech, Mizushima does not support laws that restrict the freedom of expression. Following the October 2013 court decision that ordered Zaitokukai to pay 12,260,000 yen in damages to the Kyoto No. 1 Korean Elementary School, Mizushima made a program declaring it to be an unjust political decision. Mizushima would have accepted the idea of a minor fine of around 50,000 yen as punishment for the language used by Zaitokukai, but was shocked by the severity of the decision. The bigger injustice, he argued, was how the Japanese justice system had ignored the problem that had made Zaitokukai hold a demonstration at the school. Mizushima thought that Zaitokukai activists were correct their claims that a pro-Pyongyang school was treating a public park as its own property, and Japanese authorities were doing nothing about it. That's what had attracted Zaitokukai to their school in the first place. During Channel Sakura's coverage of the story, the names of the leaders of the organization International Network to Overcome Hate Speech and Racism (Kitano, 2013) were listed on screen and denounced as

"anti-Japanese" (SakuraSo TV, 2013a).

A denunciation of hate speech does not mean that Channel Sakura is a calm and "quiet" (*odayaka*) group. Mizushima has stated that he reserves the right to take loud or unorthodox action when he deems it necessary for the sake of Japan (Kuukonuko, 2012).

Channel Sakura's videos avoid the use of extreme language such as racial slurs, but nonetheless cater to an audience that includes users who have no problem using such language. Channel Sakura's videos allow users to post comments, and top comments on many of its videos include racist rants against Koreans and Japanese. For example, several top comments on their 2nd most popular video, a 2011 report on Korean influence over the pachinko gambling industry, use the term "chon" an anti-Korean slur. Owners of YouTube channels have the ability to delete offensive comments left by users, but such comments have been allowed to remain in place for years. It is unclear whether or not Channel Sakura actively moderates comments on its videos, but some postings on third-party websites allege that comments that are critical of Channel Sakura have been removed from video comment sections.

Channel Sakura presents itself as different from mainstream media outlets, which it claims are under influence of harmful business, religious, or foreign influences. Since its start, Channel Sakura has avoided traditional advertisement-based fundraising methods – possibly because it is difficult for it to find advertisers, and possibly because it does not want to present itself as unduly dependent on business interests.

VIII. Channel Sakura's Financial Survival

Channel Sakura could be considered an "old" organization among right-wing internet media outlets. It initially attempted to survive as a subscription-based satellite television network, and only later found its way onto YouTube. It faced significant financial difficulties, but it ultimately it embraced a unique, risky, but successful business model based on voluntary contributions.

The original funding plan for the network was not very different from many other satellite television channels. Subscribers to Sky Perfect satellite

dish services would need to pay an 880 yen monthly fee to watch Channel Sakura on their television sets. Channel Sakura started by airing programs for 24 hours a day on Sky Perfect channel 767. By April 2007, funds were running low and Channel Sakura had to cut back its programming to only a few hours a week. The situation became worse in October 2008, and it was forced to temporarily stop satellite broadcasting. It returned to satellite television a month later by renting time on a satellite channel owned by another company.

In May of 2006 Channel Sakura began distributing programs on the internet. It started with an on-demand system in which users could purchase and then watch individual programs. A year later, it changed to a new system through the launch of the subscription-based So-TV website. A subscription to So-TV costs 3,150 yen a month and includes access to live broadcasts and high quality copies of Channel Sakura's entire archive of programming.

On March 21, 2008, Channel Sakura began to offer content for free by uploading some of its programs to the video sharing site YouTube.com. The programs are available to view at no cost for anyone with a broadband internet connection. However, access to the entire archive and access to live broadcasts requires a subscription to So-TV. (Checks conducted in 2014 and 2017 found that none of Channel Sakura's YouTube videos were monetized – whether or not Channel Sakura decided to opt out of YouTube's build-in advertising system, or whether YouTube rejected its monetization on the basis of potentially offensive content is unclear.)

Amid financial difficulties Channel Sakura developed an unorthodox means funding. On September 10, 2008, Mizushima and Matsuura established the 2,000 Member Committee. Its goal was to recruit 2,000 members, all of whom would pledge to donate 10,000 yen a month. Membership included free access to the So-TV website, a subscription to a printed newsletter, and the autograph from any of Channel Sakura's newscasters (SakuraSoTV, 2013c). They compared this system to the subscription fees that every television owner in Japan must pay to support public broadcasting (NHK). However, Channel Sakura's system is not mandatory. Viewers can see most of its new programs for free on YouTube, so there is no absolute need to pay anything if one wants to view Channel Sakura. By basing their network's survival on voluntary donations, they

were taking a significant risk.

Within one month, they had recruited 819 members. The number of people in the 2,000 Member Committee gradually increased, reaching a peak of 1,863 in September 2009. Between September 2009 and September of 2010, the number fluctuated between 1,600 and 1,800 (WDIC, 2011). Channel Sakura stopped reporting the number of members after September 2010, citing problems with getting an accurate count of membership. People who joined the 2,000 Member Committee were expected to pay on a voluntary basis, payment schedules were irregular, and many members had difficulty keeping up with pledged payments (SakuraSoTV, 2012).

Because 10,000 yen is quite a large sum for the average person, Channel Sakura also established lesser levels of membership. Membership in the Friends of Channel Sakura (*Tomo no Kai*) costs 2,000 yen a month and provides members with an original Channel Sakura mobile phone strap and special DVD's twice a year.[2] Channel Sakura also accepts one-time donations. Additionally, Mizushima and other individuals who appear on Channel Sakura have used programs to promote the sale of books and magazines.

On the 9th anniversary of Channel Sakura's founding Mizushima commented on the original funding structure of the organization. From his previous experience operating another channel, he had believed that a conservative satellite channel based on the same kind of monthly subscription payments would be sustainable. However, it soon became apparent that it "was a total failure" (*migoto ni shippai shita*). It was only thanks to the internet that they were able to save Channel Sakura from financial ruin. By reaching out to viewers through YouTube and Nico Nico Douga, they greatly increased the size of their viewership. More people joined their 2,000 Member Committee and other forms of contribution increased. With each year, he began to see more and more people watching Channel Sakura videos and joining offline events (SakuraSoTV, 2015).

Among the offline events organized by Channel Sakura is a special annual meeting of the Tokyo chapter of its 2,000 Member Committee. This meeting involves speeches by Mizushima and other Channel Sakura commentators, as well as a party at which fans can drink and talk to

2 More information is available at http://www.ch-sakura.jp/579.html

them. Thus, financial supporters are granted the special privilege of direct socialization with their favorite YouTube stars. The event is also filmed by Channel Sakura, so viewers who do not attend can have some idea of what they are missing out on. In a recent video response to viewer fan mail, Mizushima even joked attending the party could be an opportunity for fans to find potential marriage partners, including one of their female commentators (SakuraSoTV, 2017).

Although Channel Sakura will sometimes make announcements about funds raised from viewers on certain days, it does not make its financial records fully available to the public. Channel Sakura is a privately held company, so it operates outside of the transparency requirements that are placed upon NPO's in Japan (Pekkanen, 2000). It is possible that some sources are donating far more than 10,000 yen a month.

Since 2016 there has been some indication that Channel Sakura's 2,000 Member Committee may have lost many of its supporters. One event in particular – the 2016 scandal involving Toshio Tamogami – has reflected badly on Channel Sakura's reputation. Tamogami, an ex-general of the Air Self-Defense Forces, received enthusiastic support from Channel Sakura when he ran for the governor of Tokyo in 2014, and Mizushima served as a manager of Tamogami's campaign. Despite the fact that Tamogami performed better than many expected in the election, he was later arrested and convicted of criminal misuse of election funds. Tamogami has alleged that Mizushima knew what was going on and was involved in the illegal practices. Mizushima has denied these allegations, but the situation seems to have raised questions about his trustworthiness or his ability to properly manage funds. In an attempt to protect his reputation, Mizushima filed a defamation lawsuit against Tamogami in 2017 (Sankei News, 2017). Mizushima's Ganbare Nippon activist organization, which – unlike Channel Sakura – is a non-profit organization, provides a window into this situation. Ganbare Nippon is required by law to publicly disclose financial information, and post-scandal filings showed a huge decrease in donations. It's not unreasonable to assume that Channel Sakura also experienced a similar drop in donations.

This naturally gives rise to speculation about Channel Sakura's backers. Does Channel Sakura maintain itself mainly through relatively small donations? Could it be similar to the American "Tea Party" movement,

which portrayed itself as a grassroots movement, while in reality sustaining itself through massive financial contributions from very wealthy persons? Given Channel Sakura's relatively small size and its inability to financially maintain 24-hour satellite broadcasting,[3] it would be difficult to argue that it receives a great deal of monetary support from very wealthy donors. As of the completion of this paper, Channel Sakura and Ganbare Nippon's activism appeared to be on a scale that could be reasonably supported by about 2,000 people donating 10,000 yen a month.

IX. The Black Pigeon Speaks

The Black Pigeon Speaks channel was set up in November 2015 by a Canadian/American resident of Tokyo, and grew in popularity during the 2015/2016 migrant crisis, the presidential campaign of Donald Trump, and the emergence of so-called Alt-Right as an online political movement. Its creator has not revealed his name, so he is often referred to as the initials of his channel name: "BPS" (to avoid confusion, this paper will refer to the man as "BPS" and the channel as the "BPS channel"). BPS claims to have grown up in Canada, holds dual U.S. and Canadian citizenship, and has spent much of his adult life living and traveling outside of North America, including Thailand, Europe, India, and Japan. His exact occupation is unknown, but the frequency of his video uploads suggests that he may have become a full-time YouTuber.

The BPS channel appears to be a one-man operation. By all indications, BPS writes, records, and edits all of his own videos. The videos do not show his face, instead relying on a combination of professionally edited stock footage, computer animation, and still photographs related to the issues being discussed in each video. Two websites Vidmax and Digital Juice, in exchange for some work on their behalf, give BPS free access to their libraries of stock video, allowing for very impressive visuals. Other than that, BPS claims he is not paid by any organization, and his channel is

[3] In November 2017, Channel Sakura stopped broadcasting on satellite television and has exclusively turned to internet broadcasting. Mizushima cited the prohibitive cost as the reason for this decision.

a "one man show" (Black Pigeon Speaks, 2017a).

As of December 26, 2017, the BPS channel had over 277,121 subscribers, had uploaded 187 videos, and received a total of 28,775,658 views. That is a little over 153,000 views per video. Videos uploaded in November and December 2017 received between 75,000 and 145,000 views each. This level of popularity – exceeding that of Channel Sakura -is extremely impressive when one considers the fact that BPS does not employ cameramen or co-anchors, does not need to rent a news studio, and does not rely on the cooperation of guest contributors.

That is not to say, however, that BPS does not cooperate with ideological allies. There are several notable examples of BPS collaborating with other right-leaning YouTube channels, such as Coach Red Pill (Coach Red Pill, 2017), Lauren Southern (Southern, 2017), Millennial Woes (Millennial Woes, 2017), Brittany Pettibone (Pettibone, 2017), and Virtue of the West (VirtueoftheWest, 2017). Most of these collaborations have taken the form of BPS appearing as a guest on other YouTube channels, and could be described as promotional interviews for his channel. These interviews also build goodwill within the right-leaning YouTuber community – as BPS is much more popular than most of the individuals who interviewed him, and they no doubt appreciated the extra attention their channels would receive by uploading a video featuring BPS. The official website of BPS, theblackpigeonspeaks.com, posted an open invitation in December 2017 to anyone who were interested in collaborating on projects in 2018. This may indicate a future expansion in the scope of the BPS channel.

Videos uploaded by BPS regularly receive view counts in the hundreds of thousands.

The five most-viewed videos of all time are (View stats from December 26, 2017):

- "Japan | No Country for Islam" - 1,520,801 Views - Uploaded on January 17, 2017 – A video alleging that Japan's immigration policies seek to severely limit the number of Muslim immigrants in the country, and how that is a good thing.
- "The Transgender: Normalizing MENTAL ILLNESS" - 603,364 Views - Uploaded on April 1, 2016 - A video arguing against the mainstream media's positive portrayal of transgender persons.

- "Black Lives Matter: The Rise of the "DINDU"" - 569,848 Views - Uploaded on March 9, 2016 – A video questioning the truth behind the claims of the BLM movement, and depicting them as a racist organization.
- "Creeping Sharia: The ISLAMIZATION of the WEST" - 487,629 Views - Uploaded on April 16, 2016 - A video arguing that the EU's acceptance of large numbers of Muslim immigrants will destroy Western civilization.
- "Why Japan Refuses Immigration and Multiculturalism" - 462,870 Views - Uploaded on January 3, 2017 - A video praising Japan's extremely restrictive immigration policies.

All of these videos cover politically controversial topics and have been demonetized since YouTube's 2017 crackdown on potentially offensive content. According to BPS (responding to an e-mail from the author) another video, entitled "Why Women DESTROY NATIONS * / CIVILIZATIONS - and other UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTHS" (uploaded in February, 2016) had more views than other videos in the top 5 ranking, but it was identified by YouTube as "inappropriate or offensive to some audiences" and placed in restricted mode. This means that its view count is hidden, it does not show up on YouTube search results, and user comments were deleted and disabled (Black Pigeon Speaks, 2016).

X. The Black Pigeon Speaks' Views of Hate Speech

As the BPS channel grew in popularity, it drew the attention and scrutiny of researchers and mainstream media outlets. Zack Exley (2017), a fellow at Harvard University's Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics, and Public Policy, published a lengthy article in June 2017 focusing on BPS. Entitled, "Black Pigeon Speaks: The Anatomy of the Worldview of an Alt-Right YouTuber," the article depicted BPS as a hateful extremist. Exley wrote that BPS is a "shaper" of "a global white nationalist movement that sees Donald Trump's unexpected presidency as a once-in-a-millennium opportunity." He argued that BPS' avoidance of extreme hate speech makes his videos as helpful for attracting new followers to their racist ideology:

> *"His worldview is not as extreme as other proudly anti-Semitic or racist channels, making it more acceptable for a wider audience. When he talks*

> *about Jewish conspiracies or IQ differences between races, his tone is one of delivering unfortunate news rather than a crusade (though the content of his speech does call for a crusade, in the Hofstadter tradition). More extreme white supremacists think he's a useful recruiting tool but lacking in the purity they prize"* (Ibid).

This article was the subject of reports by the New York Times and other mainstream media outlets, bringing considerable negative attention to BPS' channel. In response, BPS created a video attacking Exley's article and referring to it as "written excrement." BPS called academia "a corrupt echo chamber of the far-left" that has been taken over by "cultural marxists." He vehemently denied the articles' characterization of himself and other YouTubers as "far right" or "anti-Semitic," and stated that to the extreme left, "anyone to the right of Bernie Sanders is literally Hitler, and if they can't find a Hitler, they will manufacture one." Exley, according to BPS, was "projecting" his own image of a conservative villain, rather than attempting to fairly portray the viewpoints expressed in BPS' YouTube videos (Black Pigeon Speaks, 2017c).

Exley's article describes BPS' videos as "proudly anti-Semitic" – an assertation that BPS has denied. BPS acknowledges that he has noted "Jewish overrepresentation" in media and banking sectors, but that Jews are also overrepresented in scientific achievement. He also states that he admires Jewish people for what he sees as their "group loyalty "and ability to "work tribally for their group interests" (Ibid). In the past, BPS has made videos attacking billionaire George Soros and the influence of big banks, but such videos have not focused on the fact that Soros and the heads of some banks are Jewish. Those that blame Zionists and Jews for the growth of left-wing ideologies have been criticized by BPS as not taking a wider historical view of the situation. However, many of his viewers do not subscribe to such a "wider" view, and numerous anti-Semitic user comments can be found posted on popular BPS videos. As in the case of Channel Sakura, there did not appear to be much moderation of user comments. BPS only moderated and responded to comments left within one hour of a video being uploaded, a practice that allowed for the survival of numerous hateful or critical comments.

Like many conservatives, BPS has an extremely negative view of

YouTube's community guidelines and other private sector attempts to police hate speech. He has attacked attempts by Google and domain registry companies to censor white supremacist websites such as the Daily Stormer, referring to such actions as an attempt to "revoke the 1st Amendment" on the internet (Black Pigeon Speaks, 2017b). BPS opposes all anti-hate speech laws, sees the United States as the last nation on earth that legally protects freedom of speech, and is concerned that private corporations can effectively dismantle that freedom, regardless of what the U.S constitution may say about free expression. When the author of this paper asked BPS via e-mail for further comment on his view of YouTube's censorship policies, BPS responded by stating that there was "ZERO transparency" and claimed that YouTube was restricting access to "basically what the ADL doesn't want you to see." The ADL is the Anti-Defamation League, an international Jewish non-governmental organization with the stated mission to "stop the defamation of the Jewish people" and "secure justice and fair treatment to all." In recent years, the ADL has proactively targeted what it considers hate speech on the internet and has called on companies such as YouTube to take action (Noonan 2018). BPS believes that the ADL has a political agenda to shut down right-leaning voices, regardless of whether they are actually anti-Semitic or racist. BPS stated that the author and the readers of this article should visit a site known as Censored List (http://www.censoredlist.com/) to see evidence that YouTube is "not going after anyone other than those the ADL see as a threat." When accessed by the author in December 2017, the user-submitted list hosted on Censored List consisted mainly of Holocaust denial videos, videos praising Adolf Hitler, videos on differences in IQ between races, anti-Islam videos, and anti-immigration videos.

BPS did not employ racist slurs or other extreme language in his videos. Thus, as of the writing of this paper, most of BPS' videos remained publicly available on YouTube and had not been placed in restricted status. But, as noted earlier in this paper, most of BPS' videos have been demonetized by YouTube, preventing him from earning income through YouTube's advertising system.

XI. The Black Pigeon Speaks' Financial Survival

Until mid-2017, most videos uploaded by BPS contained YouTube advertisements, meaning that BPS was potentially making thousands of dollars each month in advertising income alone. However, after the "Adpocalypse" and YouTube's stricter enforcement of community guidelines, the majority of BPS videos lost the ability to participate in the YouTube advertising program.

As a solution, BPS turned to Patreon, a web service that facilitates the crowdfunding of internet content creators. Content creators can set up a page on Patreon and ask for donations from "patrons." The lowest level of donation is $1 per video, but content creators can also set up different tiers, offering special rewards for higher tier donors.

The BPS Patreon page lists several contribution tiers. At the lowest level ($1 a month), patrons are granted access to blog posts and announcements that are not available to the general public. Higher tiers of support include gifts and chances to directly communicate with BPS.

As of December 2017, BPS offered the following tiers of support:

- Pledge $1 or more per video: "Get an add from BPS on any social network of your choice. "
- Pledge $15 or more per video: "Chat with Black Pigeon once a month via Google Hangouts with a small group (max 8). Get a notification sent to you every time BPS goes live. You will be able to ask BPS anything you would like, make suggestions or whatever you want."
- Pledge $25 or more per video: "Get a handwritten postcard sent to you with a small token of my appreciation. Plus you get the earlier rewards. "
- Pledge $50 or more per video: "Get a Black Pigeon Speaks T-Shirt (Reward delivered after 2 months of Patronage.) Plus you get the earlier rewards."
- Pledge $75 or more per video: "Get a one-on-one Google Hangout / Skype Call. You can speak with Black Pigeon once a month, just the two of us. We can talk about anything you'd like or I can suggest the topic. It is up to you. Plus you get the earlier rewards."
- Pledge $100 or more per video: "Get Black Pigeon's personal email address that has been created exclusively for patrons at this level. You can email about anything you'd like and get a very quick response. Suggest a topic? Maybe we can work it out together. Plus you get the earlier rewards" (Patreon, 2017).

At higher tiers, patrons are granted the privilege of regular conversations with BPS about any topic of their choosing. While this isn't quite the same as Channel Sakura's offline party, it nonetheless offers special social connections to those who financially support the channel. The $75 and $100 tiers offer a level of personal communication that surpasses anything offered to the members of Channel Sakura's 2,000 Member Committee, all of whom are paying about $88 (10,000 yen) per month. The chance to suggest topics and work together with a popular YouTuber undoubtedly has considerable appeal to ideological allies and fans.

As of the writing of this paper, Patreon listed 859 patrons for the BPS channel. The exact breakdown of patrons per tier of support was not available, but presumably some of the over 700 supporters are donating one dollar or more a month. It is not unreasonable to assume that these donations, together with occasional videos promoting affiliate links to mobile games, provide enough income to support a one-man operation.

In addition to Patreon, BPS also collects voluntary donations from Maker Support, a site that is similar to Patreon but charges smaller handling fees for donations, allowing for the collection of more small donations. As of December 2017, it listed a monthly income of $220 (Maker Support, 2017). If Patreon were to go out of business or decide to ban BPS, his supporters could conceivably move their money to alternative platforms like Maker Support.

XII. Conclusion

YouTube has taken aggressive steps to limit hate speech on its platform, requiring users to agree to community guidelines that directly prohibit such content. Users who violate the community guidelines face having their videos completely removed, placed in restrictive quarantine, or demonetized. These steps, while significant, have not, and cannot completely eliminate videos that spread hate and/or appeal to far-right audiences.

The two cases discussed in this paper – Channel Sakura and BPS – illustrate how alternative media that appeals to the far right can survive and strive despite YouTube's restrictive policies. As long as videos avoid

overt expressions of racist language or overt incitements of hatred towards entire groups, it is extremely difficult for YouTube to justify censoring or removing such content.

Even if a video may not have contained overt hate speech, there were financial steps taken to hurt far right content creators. YouTube has the power to restrict access to its lucrative built-in advertising system, denying such creators the ability to earn easy profit from popular videos. Despite having their purse strings cut off by YouTube, both channels have sought out alternative means of fundraising.

Channel Sakura and BPS rely on voluntary donation systems, rather than traditional forms of advertising. While this may seem like a very risky form of fundraising, it has notable benefits. Instead of having to create content that is advertiser-friendly, both Channel Sakura and BPS can portray themselves ideologically pure messengers who are free from corrupt commercial influences. Their calls for donations have a social appeal to them – both Channel Sakura's 2,000 Member Committee and BPS' Patreon page are invitations to join a community, whether it be in the form of offline parties or group chatrooms. Donors have an opportunity to engage in direct conversation with their favorite YouTube personalities – an experience that is usually unavailable to the consumers of mainstream media outlets. People who make donations are not simply giving money away; they are becoming members of a team. These strong social bonds between viewers and content creators encourage loyalty and continuation of financial donations.

The findings of this paper can be placed within the context of recent academic discussions of private censorship. Syned has argued that the community guidelines of sites such as YouTube and Facebook are severely flawed when it comes to dealing with online hate and fake news, noting that no "meaningful accountability mechanism exists for these platforms aside from public outcry," and that the previous hands-off approach of censoring content "offers empty guidance in the face of organized fake news or other forms of manipulation" (Syned, 2017). In addition, Klonick has analyzed the processes behind YouTube censorship policies and found that it reflects "the economic necessity of creating an environment that reflects the expectations of their users" (Klonick, 2018). Thus, in societies such as the United States and Japan, it could be argued that private censorship

of internet content is driven by the desire of corporations to satisfy the expectations of customers and advertisers. In absence of a major public outcry against content producers such as Channel Sakura and BPS, it seems unlikely that either channel will face outright removal from YouTube.

If one desires an internet in which more action is taken against Channel Sakura and BPS, it would require social networking sites to shift their focus away from advertising revenue. This point has been raised by scholars such as Cohen-Almagor, who has called on internet companies to "weigh the benefits of freedom of expression, on the one hand, and the benefits of social responsibility, on the other, investing in greater efforts in ridding their services of Internet hate and resisting financial temptations to host it" (Cohen-Almagor, 2011). Similarly, Balkin has argued that companies such as YouTube and Facebook need to "change their self-conception" towards social responsibility:

> "Ideally, they would come to understand themselves as a new kind of media company, with obligations to protect the global public good of a free Internet, and to preserve and extend the emerging global system of freedom of expression. Defenders of democratic values should work hard to emphasize the social responsibilities of digital infrastructure companies and help them both to understand and to accept their constitutive role in the emerging global public sphere" (Balkin, 2018).

Balkin draws upon the example of newspaper publishers and journalists in early 20th century America embracing a self-conception of social responsibility as a model for what could occur with social media sites in the 21st century. This view may be too optimistic, however, as Brown has argued that the instantaneous nature of internet communication makes it very difficult for sites like YouTube to "adopt the prior self-restraint employed by traditional media companies whose application of editorial guidelines and codes of conduct can be used to prevent the broadcast or publication of hate speech before it is ever broadcast or printed" (Brown 2018). One of YouTube's major features is the freedom with which users can upload new content and have it seen by other viewers in a matter of minutes, leaving almost no time for a human to exercise anything resembling traditional editorial oversight.

Another approach, suggested by Fagan, is that YouTube reorganize its architecture to "direct the flow of political messaging" and "nudge users toward network locations where higher-quality political discourse is the norm," an approach that could be largely automated (Fagan, 2018). While this approach seems more feasible than humans carrying out comprehensive editorial oversight, it might not be able to significantly weaken channels that have already built up viewer communities. Subscribers to existing channels will still be able to share links to their favorite videos and introduce them to new viewers, regardless of whether YouTube develops an algorithm that attempts to "nudge" viewers towards what it considers acceptable political discourse.

The community-building nature of internet media stands as a barrier to private regulation. The two cases discussed in this paper can be said to reflect "people's innate desire (including people with non-mainstream attitudes) to engage with like-minded others allied to the power of the Internet to put people in touch with each other—people who otherwise might be unable to connect due to geography or people who might be simply ignorant of each other's existence" (Brown 2018). Through the appeal to a viewer community for financial support, and through the awarding of social benefits to contributors, both channels have encouraged fans to think of themselves as part of a group. Small internet communities that focus around certain political ideologies and narratives tend to, in Syned's words "create their own methods to produce, arrange, discount, or ignore new facts" leading to a "bottom-up dynamic for developing trust, rather than focusing trust in top-down, traditional institutions" (Syned 2017). Indeed, many of the videos produced by Channel Sakura and BPS focus on the idea that mainstream society is being fed lies by traditional media and traditional institutions, and that the viewers of their channels are among a select few who are being told the actual truth about the world.

This situation is not limited to Channel Sakura and BPS. Similar forms of community-based funding are being employed by other alternative media outlets and political commentators. This shift to donation/crowdfunding is creating micro-communities that can financially sustain creators of non-mainstream content, effectively insulating them from various forms of censorship. To members of these viewer communities, it is a positive development, but to those seeking to censor and reduce hateful

and extremist content on the internet, it can be seen a very troubling development.

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