Twitter Thread by Dr. Jeremy Littau



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I've done two interviews in the past day with media about the Twitter/Facebook bans and the Parler shut down.

I'm trying to use these opportunities to stress something is getting lost in all the debates about the action: conversation about free expression is the wrong debate. 1/

It's pretty clear at this point the First Amendment doesn't apply. The only people making that argument are craven politicians who are trying to gin up anger.

An expression debate focuses on the content. What I keep underlining is social media is a distribution platform too. 2/

What this means is that when someone gets on and posts conspiracy theory content or seditious incitement, it isn't a question of whether it will be distributed. The publishing platform has the tools for outreach and connection that let that content travel. 3/

Think about me in my basement printing up some nutty manifesto on my laser printer. I still have a problem of reach. How do I get that message out? I could walk the neighborhood or the city, but I'm limited by time and ability.

Working with others takes social connection. 4/

Publishing through a third-party allows for mass printing, but the real power is distribution. They have marketing, sales, shipping arms to make sure those things end up in the hands of others. 5/

All of that in legacy media requires relationships, contracts, etc. Just ask Josh Hawley about his book.

So while Twitter and Facebook did make publishing much easier, the real shift was that it completely blew up the barriers to distribution. 6/

Free speech debates focus on the content. If you look at the statements from the social networks carefully, you can see their larger concerns are about how that material travels, how it flows from a single person to infect people who might not

otherwise dabble in that stuff. 7/

And look, the companies tried. I think the efforts were weak, but it’s not like they didn’t do everything possible to avoid bans. They tried tags, fact checks, oversight boards, etc. They knew the problem was spread. What did conservatives do? They called it censorship anyhow. 8/

Whatever your view of the speech merits, if you’re a social media exec and seeing that your platform was being used to spread mountains of dangerous lies that led to an insurrection, that we were minutes away from members of Congress being captured …. feel the weight of that. 9/