

What is Rumble, the video-sharing platform ‘immune to cancel culture’?

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Rumble, the video-sharing platform where Russell Brand has 1.4 million followers, may not be a household name but it has grown in popularity – especially among those from the right and “alt-right” – as a place said to be “immune to cancel culture”. Now Brand has had his YouTube channel demonetised after sexual assault allegations, which he denies, the comedian is expected to continue to profit from Rumble. But what is it and why is it on the up? What is Rumble and who owns it? Founded in 2013 by a Canadian entrepreneur, Chris Pavlovski, Rumble was designed to be an alternative to YouTube for small content creators. But it quickly began to pride itself on being the opposite of other tech firms. According to Rumble’s website, it is “immune to cancel culture” and aims to “restore the internet to its roots by making it free and open once again”. Pavlovski has described it as “neutral”. Rumble is backed by the billionaire and prominent conservative venture capitalist Peter Thiel, who invested in 2021, and the conservative former Fox News presenter Dan Bongino, who has 2.9 million subscribers himself. The platform is valued at more than \$2bn (£1.6bn). Who watches Rumble? Directly after Donald Trump lost the 2020 election, Rumble’s popularity soared, with its monthly users growing from 2 million to more than 20 million at the end of that year, according to Forbes. As of 2022, Rumble has a reported 78 million active users globally. While it was not created primarily for news, for some it has become a major news source. According to Pew Research, three-quarters of those who regularly get news from Rumble identify as Republicans or lean towards the Republican party. In contrast, 22% identify as Democrats or lean Democratic. Rumble is free to use but in 2021 it acquired Locals, a platform that allows users on Rumble to buy subscriptions to access exclusive content in creator communities. Who appears on Rumble? The most popular accounts on the platform are run by individuals, not organisations, and a quarter of those creators have been banned or demonetised on other social media sites, according to analysis by Pew of 200 highly followed accounts. As of June 2022, about 80% accounts were individuals while 20% were organisations. Alongside Brand, who regularly posts conspiracy theories and critiques of mainstream media, is Rudy Giuliani, the former mayor of New York City, who was an early adopter of the app, and Andrew Tate, known for his misogynistic views. Tate has 1.6 million followers. Trump joined Rumble after he was blocked by other platforms, and now has 2 million followers, while his son Donald Jr this year announced an exclusive partnership with the platform, where he will host a biweekly livestream show called Triggered with Don Jr. The platform is also used by Alex Jones, a conspiracy theorist, who has defended Brand and was last year ordered to pay £1.2bn in damages to families of the Sandy Hook school shooting after falsely claiming the attack was a hoax. The popular Twitch and YouTube streamers Kai Cenat and IShowSpeed joined Rumble this year for an exclusive livestreaming show. Cenat has faced

numerous temporary suspensions on Twitch, most recently in April for violating Twitch's terms of service. IShowSpeed has been banned on Twitch since 2021, after claims of sexual coercion or intimidation, according to a screenshot shared on X. What are Rumble's content guidelines? Rumble says it opposes censorship and prides itself as being one of the few "neutral" and "independent" platforms. Last year, it challenged New York's online hate speech law. Videos that contain misinformation and false claims of vote fraud have been found to be widely watched. But it does have rules designed to place some restrictions on content. In 2022, Rumble proposed policies that prohibit creators using the platform to incite unlawful conduct, dox, stalk and discriminate. Apart from adult content, racism, antisemitism and other widely accepted content red lines, under the guise of free speech pretty much everything else goes. Why is it growing? Some see it as the only safe place for users to share controversial views from individuals who may feel marginalised or left behind by the big tech firms. Users do not need to search far on the app to come across election deniers and QAnon content. It has drawn comparisons with sites such as 4chan and Truth Social, which attract users who feel they do not get the full picture from mainstream news sources, and who will not be punished for airing controversial opinions. Nic Newman, of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at Oxford University, said: "The specific gap that Rumble fills has been a growth business fuelled by Covid vaccine conspiracies and misinformation. It is no coincidence that the big growth in the user base came between 2020 and 2021. "As other platforms clamp down on extreme or inflammatory views under threat of greater regulation, the space for Rumble opens up further. Rumble remains a niche network in comparative terms with small but politically engaged [right-leaning audiences]. "That deep engagement – allied with anti-mainstream media narrative – provides fertile conditions for monetisation in multiple ways – ads, donations, merchandise, events and festivals – as seen in Russell Brand's case." Rumble was contacted for comment.