Facebook in turmoil over refusal to police Trump's posts

June 2 2020, by Julie Jammot

Facebook employees are angry CEO Mark Zuckerberg allowed a Trump message warning protesters that "when the looting starts, the shooting starts" to go unchallenged on the platform

Twitter covered up the tweet with a message warning it "violated Twitter

Rules about glorifying violence." Viewers had to click on the message to see the underlying tweet.

The message also was posted on Facebook, but Zuckerberg decided to let it stand unchallenged.

"I've been struggling with how to respond to the President's tweets and posts all day," he wrote Friday in a post.

"Personally, I have a visceral negative reaction to this kind of divisive and inflammatory rhetoric."

But, Zuckerberg went on to say that "our position is that we should enable as much expression as possible unless it will cause imminent risk of specific harms or dangers spelled out in clear policies."

Network in revolt

Twitter and Facebook both have in place systems to combat disinformation and dangerous content—appeals to hatred, harassment, incitement to violence and the like.

But Facebook exempts political personalities and candidates from these restrictions.

Zuckerberg's position has not gone down well with many of his employees.

"I don't know what to do, but I know doing nothing is not acceptable," Jason Stirman, a member of Facebook's research and development team, wrote on Twitter.

Other Facebook employees spoke out on Sunday.

President Donald Trump's post about looting was flagged up by Twitter for "glorifying violence"

David Gillis, a member of the design team who specializes in product safety and integrity, said he believed Trump's looting and shooting tweet "encourages extra-judicial violence and racism."

"While I understand why we chose to stay squarely within the four corners of our violence and incitement policy, I think it would have been right for us to make a 'spirit of the policy' exception that took more context into account," he wrote.

Nate Butler, a Facebook product designer, added: "I need to be clear –

FB is on the wrong side of this and I can't support their stance. Doing nothing isn't Being Bold. Many of us feel this way."

A presidential call

To make matters worse, US media revealed Sunday that Zuckerberg and Trump spoke by telephone on Friday.

The conversation was "productive," unnamed sources told the Axios news outlet and CNBC. Facebook would neither confirm nor deny the reports.

The call "destroys" the idea that Facebook is a "neutral arbiter," said Evelyn Douek, a researcher at Harvard Law School.

Like other experts, she questioned whether Facebook's new oversight board, formed last month to render independent judgments on content, will have the clout to intervene.

On Saturday, the board offered assurances it was aware there were "many significant issues related to online content" that people want it to consider.

Facebook, meanwhile, is directly affected by Trump's counter-attack against Twitter.

The president signed a decree Thursday attacking one of the legal pillars of the US internet, Section 230, which shields digital platforms from lawsuits linked to content posted by third parties while giving them the freedom to intervene as they please to police the exchanges.

© 2020 AFP

Citation: Facebook in turmoil over refusal to police Trump's posts (2020, June 2) retrieved 20 April 2024 from https://techxplore.com/news/2020-06-facebook-turmoil-police-trump.html

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.