

Topic: Should social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, have the right to delete posts.

In recent years, the sheer amount of social media posts made by the 45th President of the US hidden or labeled as “disputed” or “misleading” proved to be unprecedented by any other American head of state. The situation has triggered a heated debate concerning whether social media platforms have the right to delete and regulate communal posts; however, given the present era, the moderation of information through removal is a necessity.

First and foremost, in this society where news that shape citizens’ decisions are traveling increasingly faster, further, and with more force, misleading data subsequently become more consequential. Two cases, deep-fakes and posts inciting violence, help illustrate this point.

In 2019, the US Intelligence Community recognized deep-fakes as a major concern and a utility for “adversaries... to create convincing -- but false -- image, audio, and video files to augment campaigns directed against the United States...” [1]. Alternatively, *Slate*, referring to a modified video depicting the US House Speaker as drunk, suggests that machine-learning technology heralds a period of information warfare. Undeniably, monitoring deceitful content so that it is not utilized for political gain is the role of the publishers [2].

In the case of inciting violence, it’s essential to recognize that social media platforms have the authority to institute terms of service that denote what types of expression are impermissible [3]. Although the rules aren’t always observed, an instance of their application was the 45th President’s tweet, addressed to rioters mounting an insurrection against constitutional order, “... things... happen when a... landslide election victory is... viciously stripped away from great patriots who have been... unfairly treated... Go home with love & in peace. Remember this day!” [4]. Twitter, which prohibits the glorification of violence [5], later locked and permanently suspended the account for violating its rules. Empirical evidence from history suggests that

misinformation, hateful rhetoric, and repetition have devastating ripple effects. This is evident in WWII when Adolf Hitler, leader of the Nazi Party, imposed Nazi ideology upon young German boys in the Hitler Youth, thus contributing to the Holocaust, a genocide of 6-million Jews. Patterns of a violent and unlawful “call to action” by politicians and for personal political gains are acutely prominent in modern-day society and will continue unless posts are monitored.

The counterspeech doctrine, which states that the best retaliation to negative speech is positive expression, was established in 1927 when the concept of an easily-accessible digital platform was bizarre. Therefore, the doctrine cannot be applied to social media because the utter speed of uploads has incapacitated the ability to reply to them. Hence, fallacious or harmful posts -- sometimes generated by bots or automated systems -- are impossible to be responded to with anything but removal [6].

Social media platforms, equivalent to a modern public square [7], are the most powerful mechanisms available to a private citizen to make his or her voice heard [8]. Given the influences it has over the minds of citizens, it is thereby essential to halt the production of deeply-fabricated posts causing social unrest. In doing so, there is evidently no other more effective method than deletion.

References

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- [8] *Packingham v. North Carolina*, 137 S. Ct 1730 (2017); cf. *PruneYard Shopping Center v. Robins*, 447 U.S. 74, 85-89 (1980).