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August 26, 2024

Mr. Mark Zuckerberg
Chief Executive Office
Meta Platforms, Inc.
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, California 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg,

I write with great concern over the reports of shadow-bans on sports-related posts by Meta. Ensuring social media platforms remain a place where individuals can share their passions and day-to-day activities while prioritizing safety is a common goal we share.

I have recently been made aware of your platform shadow-banning athletes' accounts for their shooting related sports content under alleged violations of the Meta's "Recommended Guidelines". In particular, the censorship of Team USA Olympic and Paralympic athletes – Conner Prince and Vincent Hancook, Olympic Men's Skeet and McKenna Geer, Paralympic Para Shooting – raises concerns. Likewise, Meta also unpublished the Facebook page of the West Point Rifle Team at the U.S. Military Academy.

As you may know, shooting as a sport is an honored tradition dating back to the1896 Summer Olympics in Athens, Greece, when the sport made its Olympic debut. While I understand that Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act allows for web operators, large and small, to moderate user speech and content as they see fit, moderating sport related content which does not allude to any acts of violence or harm, but in fact is published to show perseverance, continued training, and expertise in one's craft, seems to be in line with the guidelines set in place by your company. Your policy rationale states that your platform will remove "[i]nstructions on how to make or use weapons where there is language explicitly stating the goal to seriously injure or kill people, or imagery that shows or simulates the end result, unless with context that the content is for a non-violent purpose such as educational self-defense (for example, combat training, martial arts) and military training"[i]. However, the posts outlined above (which Meta has alerted the content creators are in violation) demonstrates the latter. This leads to questions of how Meta's algorithm is evaluating and determining what content constitutes a violation.

As the leading social media platform, you are a leader in how content is regulated and by which standards to abide by. It troubles me that if there is multiple reporting in this one specific matter, there could be many unreported cases in which your company's algorithm is unjustly taking away individuals' abilities to communicate on their chosen platforms. Therefore, I urge you to lift the shadow-bans on sports-related posts.

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Moreover, with these concerns in mind, I would appreciate a response to the following questions:

1. How does your company's algorithm identify what content is against your guidelines?
    a. Is there a human component in the initial review and determination process?
    b. Has Meta determined that any imagery of weaponry is considered against community guidelines? If so, why?

2. How do you determine if an individual has a right to appeal? Reports show Meta initially blocked Ms. Geer from appealing the decision.

3. How long does Meta's review and appeal process take?

I stand ready to work with you and your team to craft a solution that ensures users have equal and fair access to your platform within the guidelines outlined by Meta. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Vicente Gonzalez
Member of Congress

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[i] https://transparency.meta.com/policies/community-standards/violence-incitement/