News Item

The perils of letting social media titans correct misinformation | Fortune

By Sarah Kreps & Douglas Kriner
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> With the election imminent, social media platforms find themselves once again in the awkward position of being the referee deciding whether to call a penalty kick in overtime.
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> Especially since this summer, social media platforms have also taken the unprecedented steps of flagging and even deleting false or misleading claims by politicians, including most recently a post by President Trump claiming that COVID-19 was “less lethal” than the flu.
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> Platforms are also taking aggressive action to remove inauthentic accounts and reduce the spread of misinformation that social media propagated in 2016. The recent case of whether and how to allow a New York Post story on their sites brings the complicated politics of content moderation into sharp relief.
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> Last week, the Post published a story allegedly revealing secret emails about a meeting between Vice President Joe Biden and an adviser to a Ukrainian energy company. Social media giants moved aggressively against the story—and in so doing became the story. Facebook limited distribution of the Post’s main story while Twitter blocked users from posting pictures of the emails, causing users who tried to share links to see a message saying that the photos were obtained through hacking and contained private information.
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> Within a day, CEO Jack Dorsey confessed that Twitter’s communication about the decision had been “not great”—blocking links without offering context was “unacceptable.”
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> The Post brouhaha exposes the potential perils of draconian action. One argument against such measures is normative: that deciding what can be shared and what is prohibited is tantamount to censorship. In this case, Twitter’s moderation response was more aggressive than its published policies, which made it harder to generate

> a patina of legitimacy in this particular instance. When it did reverse course, Dorsey explained—not entirely convincingly and thereby playing into the hands of critics—that the initial moderation choice was due to the Post story sharing personal information, rather than its unsubstantiated claims.
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Source: Joe Biden and Ukraine: Social media shouldn’t referee misinformation | Fortune