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Zuckerberg: Establishment Asked to Censor COVID-19 Posts That Ended Up Being True



Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg in Washington on Oct. 23, 2019. (Mandel Ngan/AFP via Getty Images)



By [Zachary Stieber](#)

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Big Tech firms were asked to censor COVID-19 information that ended up being true, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg has assessed.

“Just take some of the stuff around COVID earlier in the pandemic where there were real health implications, but there hadn’t been time to fully vet a bunch of the scientific assumptions,” Zuckerberg, whose company is the parent of Facebook and Instagram, said during a discussion with podcaster Lex Fridman that was released on June 8.

“And unfortunately, I think a lot of the kind of establishment on that kind of waffled on a bunch of facts and asked for a bunch of things to be censored that, in retrospect, ended up being more debatable or true,” he added. “That stuff is really tough, right? Really undermines trust.”

U.S. officials pressured Facebook and Instagram to censor posts, emails disclosed in court cases and through Freedom of Information Act requests have shown.

Rob Flaherty, a White House official, pressured Facebook to take action against “mis- and -disinformation” as well as “hesitancy-inducing content,” one email showed.

One Facebook official said in one of the messages that the company’s goal was “to help organizations to get their safety message out to the public, remove misinformation, and support overall community efforts in areas where we can be of help.”

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), meanwhile, showed executives with Facebook and other social media companies specific posts that were described as misinformation.

“There were a lot of things circulating that were not accurate information about COVID,” Carol Crawford, a CDC official, said during a deposition. “I didn’t believe we were asking them to remove content specifically,” she added later.

Facebook's actions included shutting down groups aimed at supporting people injured by the COVID-19 vaccines over alleged misinformation, according to [a lawsuit](#) filed this month by people with suspected or confirmed vaccine injuries. Facebook told Flaherty in early 2021 that the company was removing groups that contained "often-true content" that "can be framed as sensation, alarmist, or shocking."

Meta did not respond to a request for comment on Zuckerberg's new remarks, including a request for examples of censored information that turned out to be true.

Zuckerberg elsewhere in the interview said he is "very pro-freedom of speech" and that Facebook was aimed at allowing people to "express as much as possible" while describing government requests to censor content as "obviously bad" and that, ultimately, "it's Facebook's call" on how to handle such requests.

Zuckerberg also said that some of the censorship requests were "punitive or vengeful," as in "I want you to do this thing, and if you don't, then I'm going to make your life difficult in a lot of ways."

Casey Norman, a lawyer with the New Civil Liberties Alliance, a group of lawyers representing the injured plaintiffs in the new case, said Zuckerberg's remarks were contradictory.

"Zuckerberg's remarks in this interview came off to me as evasive and as an attempt to appease all sides without actually providing any meaningful answers or responses to specific issues and instances of censorship and viewpoint moderation of protected speech at the government's behest," Norman told The Epoch Times via email.

Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, who has experienced censorship on Twitter, said that Facebook's censorship "enabled school closures, vax mandates, toddler masking, and much else."

"Glad to see some humility here," he said of Zuckerberg's remarks.

Meta properties have in recent months restored some users that were banned, including presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr., though others remain banned.

Zuckerberg said that when it comes to deciding what information to take action on, “it’s best to generally boil things down to the harms that people agree on,” listing examples such as “sexual exploitation of children.”

“You want to reserve the censorship of content to things that are of known categories that people generally agree are bad,” he said.

Zuckerberg’s interview was released on the same day an investigation of Instagram found its algorithms helped connect a network of pedophiles.

A Meta spokesperson told The Epoch Times that the company works to fight child pornography on its platforms and has dismantled dozens of pedophile networks in recent years.

“Predators constantly change their tactics in their pursuit to harm children,” the spokesperson said, “and that’s why we have strict policies and technology to prevent them from finding or interacting with teens on our apps, and hire specialist teams who focus on understanding their evolving behaviors so we can eliminate abusive networks.”

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