

**United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation**

**Testimony of Jack Dorsey  
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**October 28, 2020**

Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Cantwell, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee and speak with the American people. Section 230 is the Internet's most important law for free speech and safety. Weakening Section 230 protections will remove critical speech from the Internet.

Twitter's purpose is to serve the public conversation. People from around the world come together on Twitter in an open and free exchange of ideas. We want to make sure conversations on Twitter are healthy and that people feel safe to express their points of view. We do our work recognizing that free speech and safety are interconnected and can sometimes be at odds. We must ensure that all voices can be heard, and we continue to make improvements to our service so that everyone feels safe participating in the public conversation—whether they are speaking or simply listening. The protections offered by Section 230 help us achieve this important objective.

As we consider developing new legislative frameworks, or committing to self-regulation models for content moderation, we should remember that Section 230 has enabled new companies—small ones seeded with an idea—to build and compete with established companies globally. Eroding the foundation of Section 230 could collapse how we communicate on the Internet, leaving only a small number of giant and well-funded technology companies.

We should also be mindful that undermining Section 230 will result in far more removal of online speech and impose severe limitations on our collective ability to address harmful content and protect people online. I do not think anyone in this room or the American people want less free speech or more abuse and harassment online. Instead, what I hear from people is that they want to be able to trust the services they are using.

I want to focus on solving the problem of how services like Twitter earn trust. And I also want to discuss how we ensure more choice in the market if we do not. During my testimony, I want to share our approach to earn trust with people who use Twitter. We believe these principles can be applied broadly to our industry and build upon the foundational framework of Section 230 for how to moderate content online. We seek to earn trust in four critical ways: (1) transparency, (2) fair processes, (3) empowering algorithmic choice, and (4) protecting the privacy of the people who use our service. My testimony today will explain our approach to these principles.

## **I. ENSURING GREATER TRANSPARENCY**

We believe increased transparency is the foundation to promote healthy public conversation on Twitter and to earn trust. It is critical that people understand our processes and that we are transparent about what happens as a result. Content moderation rules and their potential effects, as well as the process used to enforce those rules, should be simply explained and understandable by anyone. We believe that companies like Twitter should publish their moderation process. We should be transparent about how cases are reported and reviewed, how decisions are made, and what tools are used to enforce. Publishing answers to questions like these will make our process more robust and accountable to the people we serve.

At Twitter, we use a combination of machine learning and humans to review reports and determine whether they violate the Twitter Rules. We take a behavior-first approach, meaning we look at how accounts behave before we review the content they are posting. Twitter's open nature means our enforcement actions are plainly visible to the public, even when we cannot reveal the private details of individual accounts that have violated our Rules. We have worked to build better in-app notices where we have removed Tweets for breaking our Rules. We also communicate with both the account that reports a Tweet and the account that posted it with additional detail on our actions. That said, we know we can continue to improve to further earn the trust of the people using Twitter.

In addition, regular reporting of outcomes in aggregate would help us all to increase accountability. We do this currently through the Twitter Transparency Center. This site provides aggregate content moderation data and other information for the individuals who use Twitter, academics, researchers, civil society groups, and others who study what we do to understand bigger societal issues. We believe it is now more important than ever to be transparent about our practices.

## **II. ADVANCING PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS**

As a company, Twitter is focused on advancing the principle of procedural fairness in our decision-making. We strive to give people an easy way to appeal decisions we make that they think are not right. Mistakes in enforcement, made either by a human or algorithm, are inevitable, and why we strive to make appeals easier. We believe that all companies should be required to provide a straightforward process to appeal decisions made by humans or algorithms. This makes certain people can let us know when we do not get it right, so that we can fix any mistakes and make our processes better in the future.

Procedural fairness at Twitter also means we ensure that all decisions are made without using political viewpoints, party affiliation, or political ideology, whether related to automatically ranking content on our service or how we develop or enforce the Twitter Rules. Our Twitter Rules are not based on ideology or a particular set of beliefs. We believe strongly in being impartial, and we strive to enforce our Twitter Rules fairly.

### **III. EMPOWERING ALGORITHMIC CHOICE**

We believe that people should have choices about the key algorithms that affect their experience online. At Twitter, we want to provide a useful, relevant experience to all people using our service. With hundreds of millions of Tweets every day on Twitter, we have invested heavily in building systems that organize content to show individuals the most relevant information for that individual first. With 186 million people last quarter using Twitter each day in dozens of languages and countless cultural contexts, we rely upon machine learning algorithms to help us organize content by relevance.

In December 2018, Twitter introduced an icon located at the top of everyone's timelines that allows individuals using Twitter to easily switch to a reverse chronological order ranking of the Tweets from accounts or topics they follow. This improvement gives people more control over the content they see, and it also provides greater transparency into how our algorithms affect what they see. It is a good start. We believe this points to an exciting, market-driven approach where people can choose what algorithms filter their content so they can have the experience they want. We are inspired by the approach suggested by Dr. Stephen Wolfram, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Wolfram Research, in his testimony before the Subcommittee on Communications, Technology, Innovation, and the Internet in June 2019. Enabling people to choose algorithms created by third parties to rank and filter their content is an incredibly energizing idea that is in reach.

We also recognize that we can do even more to improve our efforts to provide greater algorithmic transparency and fair machine learning. The machine learning teams at Twitter are studying these techniques and developing a roadmap to ensure our present and future machine learning models uphold a high standard when it comes to algorithmic transparency and fairness. We believe this is an important step in ensuring fairness in how we operate and we also know that it is critical that we be more transparent about our efforts in this space.

### **IV. PROTECTING THE PRIVACY OF PEOPLE ON TWITTER**

In addition to the principles I have outlined to address content moderation issues in order to better serve consumers, it is also critical to protect the privacy of the people who use online services. At Twitter, we believe privacy is a fundamental human right, not a privilege. We offer a range of ways for people to control their privacy experience on Twitter, from offering pseudonymous accounts to letting people control who sees their Tweets to providing a wide array of granular privacy controls. Our privacy efforts have enabled people around the world using Twitter to protect their own data.

That same philosophy guides how we work to protect the data people share with Twitter. Twitter empowers the people who use our service to make informed decisions about the data they share with us. We believe individuals should know, and have meaningful control over, what data is being collected about them, how it is used, and when it is shared.

Twitter is always working to improve transparency into what data is collected and how it is used. We believe that individuals should control the personal data that is shared with companies and provide them with the tools to help them control their data. Through the account settings on Twitter, we give people the ability to make a variety of choices about their data privacy, including limiting the data we collect, determining whether they see interest-based advertising, and controlling how we personalize their experience. In addition, we provide them the ability to access information about advertisers that have included them in tailored audiences to serve them ads, demographic and interest data about their account from ad partners, and information Twitter has inferred about them.

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As you consider next steps, we urge your thoughtfulness and restraint when it comes to broad regulatory solutions to address content moderation issues. We must optimize for new startups and independent developers. In some circumstances, sweeping regulations can further entrench companies that have large market shares and can easily afford to scale up additional resources to comply. We are sensitive to these types of competition concerns because Twitter does not have the same breadth of interwoven products or market size as compared to our industry peers. We want to ensure that new and small companies, like we were in 2006, can still succeed today. Doing so ensures a level playing field that increases the probability of competing ideas to help solve problems going forward. We must not entrench the largest companies further.

I believe the best way to address our mutually-held concerns is to require the publication of moderation processes and practices, a straightforward process to appeal decisions, and best efforts around algorithmic choice. These are achievable in short order. We also encourage Congress to enact a robust federal privacy framework that protects consumers while fostering competition and innovation.

We seek to earn trust from the people who use our service every day, and I hope the principles I describe and my responses to your questions can better inform your efforts. Thank you for the opportunity to appear. We look forward to continuing this dialogue with the Committee.