

October 17, 2023

Mr. Elon Musk
Owner
X
1355 Market Street, Suite 900
San Francisco, CA 94103

Mr. Mark Zuckerberg
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
Meta
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Mr. Shou Zi Chew
Chief Executive Officer
TikTok
5800 Bristol Parkway, Suite 100
Culver City, CA 90230

Mr. Sundar Pichai
Chief Executive Officer
Alphabet Inc. and Google LLC
1600 Amphitheatre Parkway
Mountain View, CA 94043

Dear Mr. Musk, Mr. Zuckerberg, Mr. Chew, and Mr. Pichai:

I write with concerns over false and misleading content on your platforms related to the ongoing conflict between Israel and the terrorist organization Hamas.

According to numerous reports, deceptive content has ricocheted across social media sites since the conflict began, sometimes receiving millions of views.¹ These lies include claims that Ukraine had supplied weapons to Hamas; Hamas had captured a top Israeli general; Russian president Vladimir Putin had warned the U.S. against intervention; and crisis actors were masquerading as victims.² Video game footage has been passed off as genuine, and old videos from other conflicts have been reposted purporting to depict current events.³

In many cases, your platforms' algorithms have amplified this content, contributing to a dangerous cycle of outrage, engagement, and redistribution. Your platforms have made particular design decisions that hamper your ability to identify and remove illegal and dangerous content. Platforms have decided to amplify paying users' posts, optimize for engagement rather than veracity, and offload fact-checking and content moderation responsibilities to third-parties. In November 2022, X, then Twitter, laid off 15

¹ Barbara Ortutay, "[Social media is awash in misinformation about Israel-Gaza war, but Musk's X is the most egregious](#)," *Associated Press*, October 11, 2023; David Gilbert, "[The Israel-Hamas War Is Drowning X in Disinformation](#)," *WIRED*, October 9, 2023; Astha Rajvanshi, "[How Israel-Hamas War Misinformation Is Spreading Online](#)," *TIME*, October 13, 2023; Kevin Collier, "[A group of 67 X accounts spread coordinated disinformation about Israel-Hamas war, says research group](#)," *NBC News*, October 10, 2023; Shannon Bond, "[Video game clips and old videos are flooding social media about Israel and Gaza](#)," *NPR*, October 10, 2023.

² Associated Press, "[Misinformation about the Israel-Hamas war is flooding social media. Here are the facts](#)," October 13, 2023.

³ Gilbert, "[The Israel-Hamas War Is Drowning X in Disinformation](#)."

percent of its trust and safety department,⁴ and dissolved the company's Trust and Safety Council.⁵ In January 2023, Meta terminated around 175 content moderators' contracts, and reportedly laid off 100 positions focused on trust, integrity and responsibility.⁶ In February 2023, Google reduced its team developing tools to counter online hate speech and disinformation by one-third.⁷ Just last month, X slashed about half of the platform's global team dedicated to reducing disinformation and election fraud, including that team's leader.⁸

These decisions contribute to a cascade of violence, paranoia, and distrust around the world. Your platforms are helping produce an information ecosystem in which basic facts are increasingly in dispute, while untrustworthy sources are repeatedly designated as authoritative. According to a Pew survey from last year, U.S. adults under the age of 30 trust the information they see on social media platforms about as much as the information they receive from reputable news organizations.⁹ And, the emergence of sophisticated generative artificial intelligence models threatens to further undermine claims to accuracy and credibility.

Last week, the European Union sent enforcement letters to your companies and requested information on the actions your platforms have taken to remove illegal content and disinformation, respond to user and law enforcement complaints, and adopt effective risk assessment and mitigation measures.¹⁰ Although certain platforms have initiated some moderation, the mountain of false content clearly demonstrates that your current policies and protocols are inadequate.

I urge you to take immediate and concerted efforts to address the scale and speed at which disinformation is circulating, and request responses to the following questions by October 31, 2023:

- How many pieces of content have you removed related to the current conflict between Israel and Hamas? Please indicate the categories of content removed.
- How many pieces of content have you removed related to the current conflict between Israel and Hamas that were identified by your internal content moderation systems?
 - How many were identified and flagged by third-parties, including users, partner organizations, or other sources?

⁴ Sheila Dang, "[Twitter says 50% of staff laid off, moves to reassure on content moderation](#)," *Reuters*, November 4, 2022.

⁵ James Gregory & Tom Gerken, "[EU tells Meta to crack down on Israel-Hamas disinfo](#)," *BBC*, October 11, 2023.

⁶ Hayden Field and Jonathan Vanian, "[Tech layoffs ravage the teams that fight online misinformation and hate speech](#)," *CNBC*, May 26, 2023.

⁷ Thomas Brewster, "[Google Cuts Company Protecting People From Surveillance To A 'Skeleton Crew,' Say Laid Off Workers](#)," *Forbes*, February 3, 2023.

⁸ Erin Woo, "[Musk's X Cuts Half of Election Integrity Team After Promising to Expand It](#)," *The Information*, September 27, 2023.

⁹ Katerina Eva Matsa, "[More Americans are getting news on TikTok, bucking the trend on other social media sites](#)," *Pew Research Center*, October 21, 2022.

¹⁰ Steven Lee Myers, "[Fact or Fiction? In This War, It Is Hard to Tell](#)," *New York Times*, October 13, 2023; Clothilde Goujard, "[YouTube gets reminder to follow EU law over Hamas content](#)," *POLITICO*, October 13, 2023; European Commission, "[The Commission sends request for information to X under the Digital Services Act](#)," Press Release, updated on October 13, 2023.

- What specific new policies, procedures, or resources have you developed in response to the current conflict between Israel and Hamas?
- How many employees do you currently have dedicated to content moderation?
 - Of these, how many are contractors?
 - Of these, how many are dedicated to moderating non-English language content?
- What machine-learning or other automated moderation systems do you have in place to detect and flag potentially violating content?
- What policies do you have in place regarding terrorist content, violent content, content glorifying terrorist organizations, hate speech, or demonstrably false or misleading content? When were these policies last reviewed?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator