

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 21, 2021

Mr. Jack Dorsey, CEO and Founder
Twitter, Inc.
1355 Market Street, Suite 900
San Francisco, California 94103

Dear Mr. Dorsey,

On Wednesday, January 6th the United States Capitol was attacked by a violent, insurrectionist mob radicalized in part in a digital echo chamber that your company designed, built, and maintained. Twitter is among the online services most responsible for spreading fringe conspiracy theories at scale and for radicalizing some of its users to commit real-world, physical violence.

Following the attack on the Capitol, Twitter took action to remove more than 70,000 accounts associated with the dangerous QAnon movement.¹ While we welcome this move, it came six months after Twitter first announced its crackdown on QAnon, which suggests a failure to meaningfully enforce the policy after it was enacted, and after *years* of allowing QAnon and other harmful, conspiratorial content to flourish on the site. Content moderation on a service that hosts hundreds of millions of tweets per day is a whack-a-mole answer to a systemic problem, one that is rooted in the very design of Twitter.

The fundamental problem is that Twitter, like other social media platforms, sorts, presents, and spreads information to users by feeding them the content most likely to reinforce their existing political biases, especially those rooted in anger, anxiety, and fear. The algorithms Twitter uses to maximize user engagement on its platform undermine our shared sense of objective reality, intensify fringe political beliefs, facilitate connections between extremist users, and, tragically, lead some of them to commit real-world physical violence, such as what we experienced firsthand on January 6th.

Extreme, inflammatory tweets that trigger emotions like anger and fear often result in high levels of engagement on the platform, and Twitter's algorithm too often amplifies white supremacist, anti-Semitic, and other conspiracy-oriented material that can lead people to commit offline violence. Even if tweets fail to achieve mass scale virality, users can still become trapped in silos that intensify fringe views. Removing QAnon is not enough. Twitter must rethink and reengineer the fundamental architecture of its service which continues to allow for the frictionless spread of misinformation and radicalization at scale.

¹ Conger, Kate, "Twitter, in Widening Crackdown, Removes Over 70,000 QAnon Accounts." *The New York Times*, January 11, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/11/technology/twitter-removes-70000-qanon-accounts.html>.

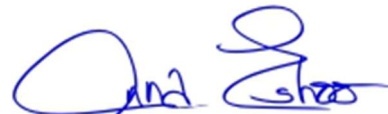
Leading up to the November 2020 elections, Twitter made a number of product changes designed to stem the spread of misinformation, including prompting users to quote tweets rather than simply retweet, removing recommendations in users' timelines and notifications, and adding context to "Trends" in the "For You" part of its platform. Prompting quote tweets over retweets reduced overall retweets and quote tweets by 20%, which the company found "slowed the spread of misleading information by virtue of an overall reduction in the amount of sharing on the service."² This change was reversed following the election.

Experts have rightly suggested that the platform needs to make permanent, fundamental design changes to limit the spread of harmful content, such as halting recommendations, limiting shares, and adding a circuit breaker-like function to slow the spread of the most viral and potentially dangerous content.³ One independent disinformation expert bluntly stated, "Twitter doesn't yet seem to understand it's a platform optimized for radicalization."⁴ It is our hope that Twitter will immediately make permanent changes to limit the spread of misinformation and other forms of harmful content, and that the company will begin a fundamental reexamination of maximizing user engagement as the basis for algorithmic sorting and recommendation.

Sincerely,



Tom Malinowski
Member of Congress



Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress

² Gadde, Vijaya and Kayvon Beykpour, "An Update on Our Work around the 2020 US Elections." *Twitter* (blog), accessed January 15, 2021. https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2020/2020-election-update.html.

³ Kornbluh, Karen and Ellen P. Goodman, "Three Steps to Help Treat America's Debilitating Information Disorder." *The Washington Post*. January 13, 2021, sec. Opinion, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/01/13/three-steps-help-treat-americas-debilitating-information-disorder/>.

⁴ Troy, Dave, "A Warning About Twitter and Radicalization." *Medium*. July 11, 2020. <https://davetroy.medium.com/a-warning-about-twitter-and-radicalization-831b724612ba>.

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