



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

FAO: FACEBOOK, TWITTER, SNAPCHAT, REDDIT, TIKTOK

Monday 25th October 2021

We are writing to you as it is clear that the online world, while it is responsible for many good things in our society, has been allowed to become home to some horrific levels of abuse which also sometimes spill out into the physical world. The inaction by social media companies like yours to take decisive action to tackle online abuse has meant that you have become enablers of abuse which rots away the very foundations of our society.

There is no doubt that social media has become an invaluable part of our lives and has transformed our world. It brings people together, empowers communities and improves the lives of people across the world.

During the pandemic, social media was a lifeline connecting us to our loved ones and to the rest of the world. As politicians, social media provides us with another method for communicating with our electorate and has fundamentally changed the way we work.

However, there are those who use social media and online platforms to commit abhorrent abuse and they do so in the knowledge that little or no action will be taken against them. Despite numerous calls for change, it is our view that insufficient steps are being taken to address this.

We were all appalled at the racism targeted at three of our national footballers after the England national team came second in the 2020 UEFA European Football Championship. This momentous occasion was marred by stories of bullying and abhorrent racist abuse across several social media platforms. Unfortunately, abuse on social media platforms is not limited to racism, with misogyny, disablism, homophobia and other types of discrimination also commonplace. Sadly, if you are in public life, whether it be as a sportsperson or a politician you are seen as “fair game”. Social media companies like yours have allowed abuse to become a fact of life. Some of my female colleagues have received the worst abuse I have ever seen. I am very worried for them. The message it gives out to our future generations is that this is simply the cost of being thrust into the spotlight which not only damages the very fabric of our society, it also undermines our democracy. Simply put, abuse which is not tolerated in the physical world is being allowed to fester in the online world.

The time to act is long overdue and we demand that social media companies place restrictions on themselves to ensure that:

1. Individuals who register accounts for personal or business use require identification in order to make them traceable. This means all accounts are traceable should the need arise. Individuals who want anonymous accounts will still be free to have them but those that want to set up multiple trolling accounts will be traceable to the



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

individual setting them up. Furthermore, linking accounts to individuals will make it harder for foreign actors to make multiple accounts and attempt to corrupt the online world. Social media companies often cite data protection as a reason not to do this, despite them holding many key aspects of our personal data. Indeed, many people join social media platforms trusting that these companies keep their personal data secure and protected.

2. Individuals who engage in racist abuse should incur a lifetime ban from online media under a 'three strikes and you are out' policy. Currently, it is too easy for individuals who have been removed from platforms to return, or they will have alternative accounts which help them retain access. Having identification attached as the first step means they would be unable to use alternative accounts and a lifetime ban would mean a lifetime ban.
3. Specific terms and racist terminology must be recognised by the algorithm and there should be a review by a UK-based human team to ensure that racist abuse online is correctly identified and dealt with. When we received reports of racist abuse remaining online despite it being reported – such as monkey emojis not being recognised as racist – then it is clear that either human intervention is required, or the algorithm needs to be improved.

As Members of Parliament, while legislating for this is within our power, we believe that the moral responsibility is on you to make social media a safe place for everyone. The failure to address this issue and robustly clean up your platforms means you are willing to be complicit in the different forms of abuse that take place. The time to act is now: we require a no-nonsense, no-tolerance approach to dealing with online abuse. You are either part of the problem or part of the solution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Saqib'.

Saqib Bhatti MBE
Member of Parliament for Meriden