Facebook employees demand change around Palestine posts

Facebook employees signed a letter urging the social media site's leadership to introduce new measures that ensure pro-Palestinian content is not taken down, as critics claim happened during last month's conflict in Gaza [File: Dado Ruvic/Reuters]

New York, June 3 (RHC)-- Nearly 200 Facebook employees have signed a letter urging the company's executives to address concerns that pro-Palestine voices on the social media site are being suppressed by content moderation systems.

The letter, first reported on by the Financial Times (FT), urges Facebook's leadership to introduce new measures that ensure pro-Palestinian content is not taken down, as critics claim happened during last month's conflict in Gaza.

The Facebook employees are also calling on management "to order a third-party audit of enforcement actions around Arab and Muslim content, and to refer a post by Israel's prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu describing Palestinian civilians as terrorists to its independent oversight board", the FT reported.

The letter further urges Facebook executives to set up an internal task force to "investigate and address potential biases" in both its human and automated content moderation systems, the FT reported.

Posted on the company's internal message board by employee groups named "Palestinians@" and "Muslims@", the letter had received at least 174 anonymous signatures by Tuesday, according to the FT. "As highlighted by employees, the press and members of Congress, and as reflected in our declining app store rating, our users and community at large feel that we are falling short on our promise to protect open expression around the situation in Palestine," the letter reportedly said.

"We believe Facebook can and should do more to understand our users and work on rebuilding their trust," the letter continued. The employees are also calling on the social media giant to commit to hiring more Palestinian talent and to clarify its policies around anti-Semitism.

During last month's Gaza conflict, Facebook labelled words used by Palestinian users, such as "martyr" and "resistance", as incitements to violence. It also took down posts about the Al-Aqsa Mosque after mistakenly associating the holy site with a terrorist organisation, according to United States media reports.

The Financial Times on Sunday reported that social media site Instagram, which is owned by Facebook, was changing its algorithm to show more viral and current affairs posts following concerns that users posting about the Gaza conflict were not reaching a wide audience.

"We know there were several issues that impacted people's ability to share on our apps. While we fixed them, they should never have happened in the first place and we're sorry to anyone who felt they couldn't bring attention to important events, or who believed this was a deliberate suppression of their voice," Facebook said on Tuesday.

"We design our policies to give everyone a voice while keeping them safe on our apps and we apply them equally, regardless of who is posting or what their personal beliefs are."

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