
TMIRI: Essay on the case of Sophie Zhang

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In this assignment, I will give an ethical evaluation of the whistleblowing case of Sophie Zhang and Facebook. We shall start with the main question that her case raised, being:

Does Facebook have an active responsibility to deal with bots?

Clearly, It is neither feasible nor desirable for Facebook to have absolute control over its user's interactions with the platform. One could even argue that some sort of automation or scripting can be helpful to some companies or individuals and completely harmless to other users.

However, the cases that Sophie Zhang denounced are on a completely different scale, as political manipulation has a great impact on society. Nowadays we are aware that platforms like Facebook have a certain cognitive effect on people. Whoever controls the media, can greatly affect what people think about, gaining power over them. I do not believe that anyone would desire a society where skilful hackers motivated by hidden powers can freely do that.

This is the preamble of Facebook's policy on inauthentic behaviour at the time of Sophie's Zhang whistleblowing (2019-2020):

"In line with our commitment to authenticity, we don't allow people to misrepresent themselves on Facebook, use fake accounts, artificially boost the popularity of content, or engage in behaviors designed to enable other violations under our Community Standards. This policy is intended to create a space where people can trust the people and communities they interact with."

Therefore, there is no doubt that Facebook has a deontological obligation to hunt and ban cases of inauthentic use. Furthermore, from a utilitarian perspective, they should prioritize going after the cases that are more harmful to their community standards.

Was Sophie Zhang's whistleblowing justified?

We can accept that there was a certain degree of professional misconduct in Facebook, due to inaction. Ms. Zhang was right to raise the issue, as there was a harmful practice happening in many societies all over the world. However, the end does not necessarily justify the means, and her clash with Facebook could certainly have gone another way.

As she stated in her interview on Newslaundry ([link](#)), once she discovered the issue, "she repeatedly pushed for an answer from Facebook, but she could not get one"