

Twitter/X defends restoring account that shared child abuse material

Publication Date: 2023-08-10

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Section: Technology

Tags: X, Elon Musk, Internet, Australian politics, Child protection, news

Article URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/aug/10/twitter-x-restores-unbans-account-shared-child-abuse-material>



The company formerly known as Twitter has faced heat from politicians in a combative hearing over X's tackling of child abuse material, after the company restored an account that shared such material last month, despite claiming to have a "zero tolerance approach". At the end of July, a rightwing influencer account with over half a million followers shared an image of child abuse material on X, stating it was to draw attention to child exploitation. It garnered more than 3m views and 8,000 retweets before it was taken down and the account was suspended. Musk claimed only staff on X's child exploitation team had seen the tweet, said the tweet was deleted and then restored the account after pressure from other rightwing accounts on the platform. Speaking before an Australian parliamentary committee on law enforcement capabilities in relation to child exploitation, X's Asia-Pacific head of global affairs, Kathleen Reen, said "any content that features or promotes that content and abuse is prohibited and will be immediately removed and their accounts permanently suspended." After facing questions from the Greens senator David Shoebridge on how such a policy squared with X's recent actions, X's head of global affairs, Nick Pickles, said permanent suspension was "one option" but sharing content on an outrage basis was something the company was considering. Sign up for Guardian Australia's free morning and afternoon email newsletters for your daily news roundup "One of the challenges we see is, for example, people sharing this content out of outrage because they want to raise awareness of an issue. They see something in the media," he said. "So if there are circumstances where someone shares content but, under review, we decide the appropriate remediation is to remove the content but not the user." Pickles said the politicians should not focus on individual accounts, pointing to claims from X that in April 2023 it suspended 2.5m accounts for sharing or engaging with child abuse material. He argued X had stepped up action against such accounts since Musk's takeover in October last year. This response prompted politicians across the political spectrum at the hearing to take Pickles and Reen to task for X failing to suspend accounts sharing child abuse material in outrage. "How can you come here and tell us you have a zero tolerance approach when that's the behaviour of your boss only a few short weeks ago?" Shoebridge asked. "We stand by our commitment and the statement of our zero tolerance approach. And we'd be happy to come back on notice with specifics on this case if that's helpful," Reen replied. "There is no excuse, whether you're posting something through outrage, which to me just is not logical, that your account should not be permanently suspended," Labor chair senator Helen Polley said. "You can see why we don't have a lot of faith and trust in what you're telling us here today." Pickles thanked the committee for the feedback, promising to raise it with X leadership. "We do think about these balances every day across the company, they're difficult issues to get right."