Twitter Addresses Controversy Over How Photos Are Cropped in Tweets

Twitter issued its response to last month's controversy over how its algorithm crops photos.

A tweet by Iqlusion co-founder Tony Arcieri showing how Twitter's algorithm repeatedly chose to display the face of Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) instead of that of former President Barack Obama when cropping a photo containing headshots of the two men spurred a host of copycat examples that were shared throughout social platforms last month.

Twitter chief technology officer Parag Agrawal and chief design officer Dantley Davis said in a blog post Thursday that the social network's analyses of the machine learning system that decides how images should be cropped before being displayed on Twitter have not uncovered any racial or gender bias.

They explained, "The image cropping system relies on saliency, which predicts where people might look first. For our initial bias analysis, we tested pairwise preference between two demographic groups (white-Black, white-Indian, white-Asian and male-female). In each trial, we combined two faces into the same image, with their order randomized, then computed the saliency map over the combined image. Then, we located the maximum of the saliency map, and recorded which demographic category it landed on. We repeated this 200 times for each pair of demographic categories and evaluated the frequency of preferring one over the other."

Agrawal and Davis said Twitter is exploring ways to decease its reliance on machine learning and give users more visibility and control over what their mages will look like in tweets, adding that the social network is committed to following the “what you see is what you get” principles of design, meaning that the photo people see in the tweet composer is what it will look like in the tweet.

They cautioned that there will be exceptions, such as photos that aren’t standard sizes, or very long or wide, and the platform will continue to experiment with how to present those images while not losing the creator’s focal point or compromising the integrity of the photo.

Agrawal and Davis concluded, “Bias in ML systems is an industrywide issue, and one we’re committed to improving on Twitter. We’re aware of our responsibility and want to work toward making it easier for everyone to understand how our systems work. While no system can be completely free of bias, we’ll continue to minimize bias through deliberate and thorough analysis, and share updates as we progress in this space.”

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Facebook Sues 2 Companies for Data Scraping

Facebook filed a lawsuit Thursday against two companies that it accused of data scraping from Facebook and Instagram, as

well as Amazon, LinkedIn, Twitter and YouTube.

Director of platform enforcement and litigation Jessica Romero said in a Newsroom post that BrandTotal, based in Israel, and Unimania, incorporated in Delaware, used scraping to engage in an international data harvesting operation, using the data they scraped to sell marketing intelligence and other services.

Romero explained, “Scraping is a form of data collection that relies on unauthorized automation for the purpose of extracting data from a website or app. In order to evade our protections against scraping, these companies exploited our users’ access to our service through a set of browser extensions called ‘UpVoice’ and ‘Ads Feed’ designed to access and collect data. When people installed the extensions and visited our websites, the browser extensions used automated programs to scrape their name, user ID, gender, date of birth, relationship status, location information and other information related to their accounts. The defendants’ extensions sent the scraped data to a server shared by BrandTotal and Unimania.”

The company filed a pair of similar lawsuits in August, in the U.K. and the U.S.

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Facebook Adds Several New Features for Group Admins, Discovery of Public Groups

Facebook used its Facebook Communities Summit virtual event Thursday to introduce several new features related to groups on both the administrator and user side.

Fidji Simo, head of the Facebook application, said in a Newsroom post Thursday, “As we approach the 10-year anniversary of Facebook groups, we’re reminded how online communities can be a lifeline when people can’t be physically close. More than 1.8 billion people use groups every month, and there are tens of millions of active communities on Facebook where people come together to talk about their interests, learn new things, be entertained and make connections. We know groups need to be safe for everyone, so we’ve made changes to reduce harmful content and misinformation, too.”

Group admins can now use the Admin Assist tool to set rules that will guide Facebook in helping to moderate posts in the group, such as declining posts with certain keywords, or from people who haven’t been in the group long or have had posts reported in the past.

Admins can also organize content in their groups by hashtag and pin topics to the top of the group to highlight them for

all members.

Facebook

New ways to spark discussions and boost engagement within a group include chats that can be created and joined in real-time.

Facebook

Prompts are a new type of collaborative post that enable users to share photos about a specific topic and swipe through everyone’s responses.

Facebook

Admins can host text-based question-and-answer sessions that are easy for members to participate in.

Facebook

And people can set custom profile photos for different groups they belong to, as well as customize their profiles to share information that is relevant to each community.

Facebook will also begin testing new ways for people to discover public groups on and off its platform.

Some users may begin seeing Related Discussions in News Feed when someone posts a link or reshared a post on the social network, enabling them to see what other groups are saying about the same content.

Facebook

Facebook

The groups tab will display posts from public groups that are related to people’s interests, as well as popular posts from public groups.

Facebook

\Simo added, “You may start to see conversations from public groups more outside of the Facebook app, like when you’re searching the web.”

Admins of public groups will have the option of whether or not to include their groups in this new experience, and they will be able to activate post approvals for their groups during the opt-in process, which will apply to existing members, new members and non-members.

Simo wrote, “From there, it’s easy to join the conversation without joining the group, as long as the community allows it. Admins still have control over their group settings, like who can post and comment without approval, and we’ll show people

the group rules before they post so that community culture stays strong. The new Admin Assist feature also makes it easy to limit specific types of posts.”

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Nextdoor Helps Neighbors Map Out Their Safe Halloween Plans

Nextdoor is bringing its annual Treat Map back with some new features to reflect the impact of Covid-19 on Halloween 2020.

The neighborhood social network said a recent nationwide poll it conducted found that 73% of respondents are looking for alternatives to traditional trick-or-treating with the pandemic in mind.

Nextdoor users can share lower-risk festivities they are partaking in—such as haunted décor, pumpkin projects and costume wave parades—via Treat Map, and their neighbors can then explore the feature to see how people in the area are celebrating and plan their activities accordingly.

Nextdoor/Party City

The platform also teamed up with Party City on an augmented reality experience where families can use their smartphone cameras and go to Treat Map to bring Halloween-themed virtual visitors to life in their homes.

When people find the virtual visitors, they can snap a photo and share their discoveries to their Nextdoor feed, as well as locate Party City stores near them.

Nextdoor/Party City

Nextdoor users who want to add their homes to Treat Map can:

- Open the Nextdoor application, or visit nextdoor.com/Halloween to login or create a Nextdoor account.
- Visit their neighborhood map.
- On mobile: Tap “More” at the bottom right of the screen, then tap “Treat Map” underneath “Neighborhood.” On the web: Treat Map is located in the upper-right-hand corner of the screen.
- A window will appear that asks, “How are you celebrating Halloween?” Choose from one of the following selections: haunted décor (ghoulish adornments on your car or residence), pumpkin projects (show off your painted or

carved jack-o-lanterns) or costume wave parade (dress up and say “hi” to neighbors.

To find the AR virtual visitors:

- Look for ghosts on Treat Map with the label “View in 3D.”
- Click on “View in 3D.”
- Once you find the virtual visitor, take a picture of it.
- Follow the instructions to post to the Nextdoor news feed.
- Check back every Thursday to find new virtual visitors.

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Pinterest Creator Festival Set for Oct. 15

Pinterest will host its digital Pinterest Creator Festival event Oct. 15 at 10 a.m. PT/1 p.m. ET.

The event is open to all creators, with the aim of educating them, celebrating them and inspiring them to create on the platform.

Chief marketing officer Andréa Mallard said in a blog post, “We hope that everyone who sees this new work, tries a new Story Pin or joins our festival will carpe this diem. And every diem after this. Because there’s a huge audience out there, looking for compelling ideas—for what to make for dinner, or to make a plan, or to make their life better—and

they could find yours. You just have to make it."

On that note, Pinterest's latest campaign, Make the World Make, "celebrates 10 genre-defying creators," Mallard wrote, "and not just the things you make, but the things you make us feel. Floral arrangements that can lift up culture. Desserts that can challenge societal norms. Outfits that turn insecurities into boldness, makeup that starts a conversation, a workout that accepts no excuses."

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Glassdoor Rolls Out New Features to Rate Companies on Diversity, Equity and

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Twitter Sets Goals for 2025: 25% of U.S. Workforce Underrepresented Minorities, 10% Blacks

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Messenger From Facebook Features to Be Integrated Into Instagram Direct

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Snapchat Extends Show Up Campaign With National TV Spot During Presidential Debate

Snapchat is taking to the airwaves, airing a spot on national television and across select markets in the U.S. during the first presidential candidates' debate Tuesday night.

The spot is part of nonpartisan, multi-week public awareness effort Show Up, which also featured public-service announcements starring former President Barack Obama earlier this month.

The campaign is aimed at encouraging first-time and younger voters to register to vote, learn about the issues and candidates, and ensure that they cast their votes, either in-person or by mail.

The spot will run during Tuesday night's debate on national networks including CBS, CNN, Fox and Fox News, as well as in select local markets.

It was developed by Snap Inc.'s internal creative team and produced by Los York.

Snap cited research it commissioned earlier this year from Morning Consult, which found that the Snapchat Generation is more likely to get news about politics from friends and family, and that the same group is more than twice as likely

to say friends and family are a top reason motivating them to vote.

The company also released research from Circle/Tufts last week, indicating that 85% of Generation Z respondents believe young people have the power to change the country and 82% feel that the pandemic made them realize the impact of decisions by political leaders on the everyday lives of people.

Snap said Snapchat reaches more people between the ages of 13 and 24 in the U.S. than Facebook, Instagram and Messenger From Facebook combined, and 80% of the 100 million Snapchatters in the U.S. are of voting age, 18 or older.

Snapchat has already helped over 916,000 people register to vote during this election cycle through its suite of mobile voter registration tools.

For the 2018 midterm elections in the U.S., Snapchat helped over 450,000 users register to vote, with 57% of them actually following through and going to the polls.

CREDITS:

Snapchat:

Chief marketing officer: Kenny Mitchell

Global creative director: Leo Macias

Senior brand marketing manager: Jill Kinney

Senior creative lead: M.J. McCallum

Lead brand designer: Abe Vizcarra

Brand designer: Jules McLean

Lead language designer: Brian Lee

Language designer: Adam Rotstein

Senior media planning and strategy manager: Karlo Cordova

Senior strategy and planning manager: Ellis Hamburger

Social media manager: Kiyome Okikawa

Social media strategist: Diamond Jones

Head of production: Tim Newfang

Producer: Jeff Holiday

Project manager: Justin Mersinger

Creative intern: Assetou Cherif

Los York:

Executive creative directors: Seth Epstein, Scott Hidinger

Executive producer/accounts: Melina Osornio

Executive producer: Leticia Gurjao

Head of production: Mariel Sands

Senior producer: Jake Hibler

Chief financial officer: Melissa Redondo

Talent coordinator: Jade Fuller

System engineer: Sid Bedi

Editors: Robert “Chip” Sneed, Lin Wilde

Designers: Josh Kopeika, Marina Murad, Jaime Van Wart

Animators: Adam Linden, Christian Palma

Los York live action:

Directors: Dane Del Deo, Mikayla Gamble

Executive producer: Leticia Gurjao

Line producer: Scott Ludden

Olio Creative:

Colorist: Marshall Plante

Executive producer: Natalie Westerfield

Huntress:

Mixer: Daniel Hart

Creative director: Scott Glenn

Head of production: Caroline O’Sullivan

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Facebook Inks Content Deals for Watch Together Messenger Feature

There is now a lot more to watch via the Watch Together feature Facebook introduced earlier this month, as the social network reached content agreements with Lionsgate, Sony Pictures Entertainment and Warner Bros.

Watch Together enables people to share their reactions to Facebook Watch videos with their friends and family during video calls on Messenger From Facebook and via the Messenger Rooms group video-calling feature.

The social network said in a blog post, “Now, people can tune in together, even if they’re not, and check out features like Fruitvale Station, Hairspray and Reservoir Dogs, just to name a few, with hits like Madea’s Family Reunion and Karate Kid coming soon. Or, maybe binge watch a season of Community or Dawson’s Creek with your besties. And with Halloween coming up, get into the spooky spirit with selections like The Blair Witch Project, The Descent or The Grudge 2.”

Facebook said when it introduced Watch Together that there are over 150 million video calls every day on Messenger, and over 200 million videos are sent through the application.

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