Twitter abruptly changes hacked-materials policy after blocking Biden story



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Twitter has changed its policy on sharing hacked materials after facing criticism of its decision to block users from tweeting links to a New York Post article that contained Hunter Biden emails allegedly retrieved from a computer left at a repair shop.

On Wednesday, Twitter said it blocked links to the Post story because it included private information and violated Twitter's hacked materials policy, which prohibits sharing links to or

images of hacked content. But on late Thursday night, Twitter legal executive Vijaya Gadde wrote in a thread that the company has "decided to make changes to the [hacked materials] policy and how we enforce it" after receiving "significant feedback."

Twitter enacted the policy in 2018 "to discourage and mitigate harms associated with hacks and unauthorized exposure of private information," Gadde wrote. "We tried to find the right balance between people's privacy and the right of free expression, but we can do better." Twitter will thus change its hacked materials policy to "no longer remove hacked content unless it is directly shared by hackers or those acting in concert with them." Twitter will also "label Tweets to provide context instead of blocking links from being shared on Twitter."

Twitter spokesperson Brandon Borrman wrote that the Post article is still blocked because "the materials in the article still violate our rules on sharing personal private information." However, I was able to tweet a link to the Post story today and the block appears to be lifted.

Twitter CEO: "Straight blocking of URLs was wrong"

Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey acknowledged that Twitter handled the Post situation poorly, writing on Wednesday that "blocking URL sharing via tweet or DM with zero context as to why we're blocking [was] unacceptable." Today, Dorsey commented on the policy change, writing that "Straight blocking of URLs was wrong, and we updated our policy and enforcement to fix. Our goal is to attempt to add context, and now we have capabilities to do that."

The Post's headline on the story in question is, "Smoking-gun email reveals how Hunter Biden introduced Ukrainian

businessman to VP dad.” But as the Poynter Institute’s PolitiFact noted, the emails cited in the Post article “do not establish that such a meeting ever occurred.”

While Twitter blocked links to the story outright, Facebook instead reduced its distribution.

New tools, new rules

Gadde noted that Twitter is “no longer limited to Tweet removal as an enforcement action” because of recently added features “such as labels to provide people with additional context.”

“We believe that labeling Tweets and empowering people to assess content for themselves better serves the public interest and public conversation,” she wrote. “The Hacked Material Policy is being updated to reflect these new enforcement capabilities.”

Other rules that could apply to the same types of tweets aren’t changing. “All the other Twitter Rules will still apply to the posting of or linking to hacked materials, such as our rules against posting private information, synthetic and manipulated media, and non-consensual nudity,” Gadde wrote.

The new policy is not yet in place but will be implemented “in the coming days,” Borrman wrote. Borrman also wrote that the policy was not “meant to chill journalistic efforts or whistleblowers.” But after Twitter’s decision to block the Post article, “very valid concerns were raised about the possible impact on some of the most important uses of Twitter,” he wrote.

Twitter and Facebook moderation is under scrutiny by the Trump administration, with Federal Communications Commission Chairman Ajit Pai moving ahead with Trump’s request to limit the legal protections that social-media websites have for

decisions to block or modify content. The Senate Judiciary Committee reportedly plans to issue a subpoena to Dorsey over the Post article-blocking.

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