



September 18, 2021

Mr. Mark Zuckerberg
CEO
Facebook, Inc.
Menlo Park, California

Mr. Zuckerberg,

I am writing to share a few thoughts, following a Facebook imposed 24-hour ban yesterday.

I used the word “fools” (“tontos” in Spanish) in connection to a reference to the French submarine contract fiasco reported in worldwide news this week. The Facebook algorithm charged me with “hate speech”. This was appealed, but no action or review was done. That was my second “strike”, for which I was now punished.

A few months earlier, the Facebook algorithm decided a picture I published –an image directly lifted from a recognized local news outlet- constituted “praise for violence or organized crime”.

At the time, the Facebook Oversight Board had been established. After requesting internal review, Facebook told me there was no human to review my publication and that the violation would stand. I belong to several crime reporting groups in my city, where hundreds of graphic pictures are posted, discussing and visualizing the very types of incidents like the one I posted about—for which I was sanctioned.

I spent over an hour putting together an application for the Oversight Board, only to learn upon later inquiry it was not selected for review –and my machine adjudicated “violation” stood. The OB did not even bother to tell me. I had to find out.

I am outraged because a machine, a computer program that does not detect nuance nor context, charged me with violating terms of service, and no human reviewed any of it. A machine has been at once policeman, judge, jury and executioner. And of course, there’s no appeal to this.

I have had my Facebook account since August 2007, fourteen years and some days. If anything, I've become a more mature Facebook participant. Yet the violations surge now. I don't think I've changed, but I have reasons to believe the Facebook algorithm settings have.

If I had violated a rule –as I see others do daily on Facebook- I would “own” it and accept my sanction –just as I did when I would get written up for minor infractions when I was a Midshipman at the US Naval Academy. But there is something profoundly wrong when unfairness creeps in. A fundamental unfairness that makes me take yet more time to write you, hoping that some human, even if just the mailroom clerk, actually reads this.

By the time this reaches you, the 24-hour “ban” the computer imposed will have expired. But I have received a different, unintended message from Facebook. Maybe the salutary thing is to dial back, and take steps to make it less relevant to my life. To be sure, it had been important, very important. Upon waking, I would often look at Facebook to see what was new.

I also felt like a good and useful participant in dozens of Facebook groups I've belonged to. I've gotten mail from others, some saying they stay (in a particular group) because of what I bring to the table.

But Facebook's unfair ban leads me to rethink all this. Perhaps Facebook is an illusion, after all, a waste of time.

One of the things I discovered during the past 24 hours is the enormous amount of time I spent interacting via the platform. And I feel the brunt of what I have to call “corporate ingratitude”.

I will be taking meaningful steps to ensure that Facebook no longer has the important place it had assumed in my daily living over the past decade plus.

Why would I bother to tell you? This is only one man's letter, but perhaps statistically representative of others, who may have had the same thing happen to them, but do not write. I am certain that whatever modifications have been done to the algorithms have “ensnared” thousands of responsible users, turned them into “outlaws” and alienated them.

Given the automated and unfair way Facebook has handled my own account matters, I don't even expect a reply from you. But this is, after all, for the record. Thank you for the unexpected lesson.

Sincerely, Orlando Gotay
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