

Center for Countering **DIGITAL HATE**

Mark Zuckerberg, CEO, Facebook/Meta
Sheryl Sandberg, COO, Facebook/Meta
Nick Clegg, Vice President, Facebook/Meta
Adam Mosseri, Head of Instagram
Cindy Southworth, Head of Women's Safety, Meta

April 8, 2022

Dear Mark Zuckerberg, CEO, Facebook/Meta, Sheryl Sandberg, COO, Facebook/Meta, Nick Clegg, Vice President, Facebook/Meta, Adam Mosseri, Head of Instagram, and Cindy Southworth, Head of Women's Safety, Meta,

Instagram, the app that you claim “put[s] people first,”¹ is failing women, people of color, LGBTQ+ people, and marginalized communities on a systemic and categorical level.

In August 2021, following a wave of racist and bigoted attacks against Black English footballers in the Euro 2020 final, Adam Mosseri, the head of Instagram, published a blog post that announced new features to “help protect people from abuse” on the app.² The blog claimed to limit DM requests and comments, increase the ability for users to filter abusive direct messages (DMs), and promised to combat the abuse that many people experience by simply using your products.

These changes placed the onus of protecting oneself from abuse and identity-based hate on users, not on abusers or Instagram to stem the flow of harassment and abuse that you know thrives on your platform. Further, these tools to report abuse are both insufficient and ineffective when tested by independent researchers. New research from the Center for Countering Digital Hate, which partnered with women based in the UK, including Sharan Dhaliwal, Bryony Gordon, Amber Heard, Jamie Klingler, and Rachel Riley, shows that:

- Instagram failed to act on 90% of abusive DMs reported using the platform’s tools.
- 1 in 15 DMs sent by strangers to high profile women violate Instagram’s Community Standards.
- Instagram failed to act on 9 in 10 violent threats sent to women over DM and reported using its tools.
- Instagram failed to act on any of image-based sexual abuse reported using its tools within 48 hours.³

¹“About Us”, Instagram, accessed 4 April 2022

²“Introducing New Ways to Protect Our Community from Abuse” Instagram blog, 10 August 2021

³ Center for Countering Digital Hate, 6 April 2022, counterhate.com/hiddenhate

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Civil society and advocacy groups have long campaigned for social media platforms to take attacks against women, specifically Black women, women of color, LGBTQ+ people, and marginalized communities seriously. The Women's Disinformation Defense Project, stewarded by Ultraviolet and joined by more than 75 groups across the progressive movement, sent you a letter last year that demanded stronger policies and enforcement against misogynistic hate speech, harassment, and discrimination on your platforms.⁴ In short, Meta has not listened.

Your inaction conveys a clear message: Instagram is committed to its profits more than the safety of the people who use their product. Online misogyny, made easy by platforms' functionality, has offline impacts in normalizing gender-based violence and harassment. In the absence of effective tools to stop the stream of harmful content, women have been forced to find their own solutions, often tailoring their content to avoid provoking abusers or avoiding posting altogether to reduce their visibility. Platforms' purported safety measures are both ineffective and shift the burden of preventing misogynistic and online gender-based violence to those who suffer the abuse. Instagram, and other mainstream platforms, have permitted the creation of a culture of intimidation, narrowing the parameters of people's freedom of speech and expression, thereby creating spaces that are safer for abusers than users.

Meta and Instagram have the power to make changes to their platform functions and processes that currently allow gender-based violence, harassment, and abuse to run rampant. Instagram also has a basic duty to uphold its safety promises to users.

We, the undersigned, call on Meta and Instagram to do the following:

- Commit to the recommendations of the Women's Disinformation Defense Project to address misogyny, disinformation, and extremism on your platforms.
- Instagram must fix its broken systems for reporting abuse.
- Instagram must close routes used by abusers to send direct abuse.
- Instagram must invest in moderation and prioritize direct abuse.

Platforms must enforce their hate speech standards, strengthen reporting tools without putting the onus on those who are targeted, and fulfill the basic duty to put the safety of women and marginalized communities before profit.

Signed,

Center for Countering Digital Hate
Jamie Klingler
Sharan Dhaliwal
Eyecatcher/Shevolution
Fair Vote UK

⁴ Ultraviolet,
<https://weareultraviolet.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Letter-to-platforms-from-75-nonprofits-about-misogyny.pdf>

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