

Request for Public Comment Regarding Technology Platform Censorship

The Federal Trade Commission invites public comment to better understand how technology platforms¹ deny or degrade (such as by “demonetizing” and “shadow banning”) users’ access to services based on the content of the users’ speech or their affiliations, including activities that take place outside the platform.² In doing so, technology platforms may employ opaque or unpredictable internal procedures to restrict users’ access to services, often without any advance notice, leaving affected users with little ability to mitigate the related harm. Users may also receive little information about the alleged violations that led to their dismissal or downgrading on the platform. Technology platforms may similarly deny their users a meaningful opportunity to challenge or appeal the platforms’ decisions. Such actions by technology platforms may violate their terms of service or other policies (collectively, “policies”) and flout users’ reasonable expectations based on the technology platforms’ public representations. Such policies and practices, which may affect competition, may have resulted from a lack of competition or may have been the product of anti-competitive conduct.

FTC staff is interested in understanding how consumers have been harmed—including by potentially unfair or deceptive acts or practices, or potentially unfair methods of competition—by technology platforms that limit users’ ability to share their ideas or affiliations freely and openly. FTC staff encourages members of the public, including current and former employees of technology platforms, to comment on any issues or concerns that are relevant to the FTC’s consideration of this topic, including, but not limited to, the following questions:

1. Under what circumstances have platforms denied or degraded (“shadow banned,” “demonetized,” etc.) users’ access to services based on the content of the users’ speech or affiliations?
 - a. What specific adverse actions did the platform take?
 - b. Did the platform take such adverse actions in response to its users’ speech or actions on the platform?
 - c. Did the platform take such adverse actions in response to users’ off-platform activities?
 - d. How and when, if at all, did the platform notify its users about such adverse actions or explain its decisions?
 - e. Did countervailing benefits to consumers or competition justify the platform’s decisions to deny or degrade its users’ access to services?

¹ Technology platforms may include, among others, companies that provide social media, video sharing, photo sharing, ride sharing, event planning, internal or external communications, or other internet services.

² Such potentially unlawful conduct affects not just any given speaker or potential speaker, but also consumers that would have otherwise received or had a higher likelihood of receiving the censored content.

2. At the time of the adverse actions, did the platforms have policies or make other public-facing representations about how they would regulate, censor, or moderate users' conduct on and off the platform?
 - a. Did the policies or other public-facing representations describe how, when, or under what circumstances the platform would deny or degrade users' access to its services?
 - b. Did the platform adhere to its policies or other public-facing representations?
 - c. Has the platform revised, updated, or changed its approach to regulating users' speech or actions or for denying or degrading users' access to services? If so, what, if any, revisions, updates, or changes have been made? How and when did the platform give notice of these revisions, updates, or changes to its users?
 - d. Has the platform acted in a consistent manner in response to analogous conduct by different users?
 - e. Were the platform's policies consistent with the internal or external statements of its executives and employees?
3. Did the platform represent, implicitly or explicitly, whether users had the ability to challenge or appeal adverse actions that deny or degrade the affected users' access to services?
 - a. Did the platform offer a meaningful opportunity to challenge or appeal adverse actions that deny, or degrade users' access, consistent with its users' reasonable expectations based on its representations?
 - b. How long did the platform take to adjudicate such challenges or appeals?
 - c. Has the platform applied a consistent challenge or appeals process in response to analogous conduct by different users?
4. How did the platforms' adverse actions affect users (including creators of content)?
 - a. How were users' ability to earn money or build followings affected?
 - b. Did competing technology platforms engage in analogous conduct against the same users?
 - c. Were users induced into joining and investing their time and money in a platform under the expectation of one set of moderation policies, only to have the rules changed from under them?

- d. Were users targeted by such adverse actions able to find adequate substitutes in other platforms?
 - e. Were users able to reach similar audiences and achieve similar goals (such as monetization and reach) on competing platforms?
5. What factors motivated platforms' decisions to adopt their policies or to take the adverse actions?
- a. Were they made in response to pressure from advertisers or other businesses?
 - b. Were they made in response to the actions of state, local, or federal governments?
 - c. Were they made in response to actions of foreign governments or other foreign entities?
 - d. Were they made to pursue the private interests of platform employees or executives, rather than the business interests of the platform?
 - e. Did platform employees or executives encourage, or collude with, outside parties to pressure the platforms to change their policies or take the adverse actions?
6. Were platforms' adverse actions made possible by a lack of competition? Did the practices and policies affect competition?
- a. Did platforms adopt similar policies to and take similar adverse actions as other platforms?
 - b. Did platforms agree or otherwise coordinate (including directly or through trade associations, certification bodies, or other means) with other platforms as to their policies and adverse actions?
 - c. To what extent have platforms funded or collaborated with organizations, for-profit or non-profit, that advocated for or enabled censorship? Were such activities, such as advertising boycotts, designed to facilitate collusion on censorship?
 - d. Were platforms able to achieve market dominance under permissive content policies, only to change policies after they had achieved market power?
 - e. To what extent did platforms use their dominance in other markets, such as search engines and app stores, to prevent competition from platforms with different moderation policies?

Comments must be received no later than **May 21, 2025 by 11:59pm ET**.

Instructions for submitting:

1. Go to the docket on regulations.gov
2. Click “Browse Documents”
3. Underneath the document containing the RFI questions, click comment (the blue button)
4. Fill out the form which requires:
 - 4.1. The comment text itself
 - 4.2. The comment category
5. You can submit as: an individual, an organization, or anonymous
 - 5.1. Optional: Attachments to aid your response. You can attach up to 20 files, but each file cannot exceed 10MB. Valid file types include: bmp, docx, gif, jpg, jpeg, pdf, png, pptx, rtf, sgml, tif, tiff, txt, wpd, xlsx, xml.

Please DO NOT include sensitive or confidential information in the comments including:

- social security numbers;
- dates of birth;
- driver’s license numbers or other state identification numbers;
- financial account information;
- sensitive health information; or
- competitively sensitive information.

Comments will be posted on the Internet and made available to the public (subject to exceptions such as for personal privacy information). Comments submitted in response to this RFI could inform the FTC’s enforcement priorities and future actions.