

Facebook lifts ban on content from rival social network Tsu

December 8 2015, by Michael Liedtke

Facebook has lifted a ban that blocked material from Tsu.co, a small rival challenging the world's largest social network's financial dependence on free content shared by its 1.5 billion users.

The reversal comes a month after The Associated Press published a story airing concerns that Facebook might be abusing its power to thwart competition and stifle the concept advanced by Tsu that people should be paid for the stories and images that they post on social networks.

"We won in the court of public opinion," Tsu CEO Sebastian Sobczak said Tuesday. "When you have something new and novel in the market like what we are doing, this kind of validation is extremely important. It feels like we just got a golden stamp of approval."

The dispute between one of the Internet's most powerful companies and Tsu began in late September when Facebook removed nearly 10 million posts containing links and other references to Tsu (pronounced "soo"). Facebook also blocked attempts to post anything else that sent traffic to Tsu.co, both on the pages of its social network or on in its popular Messenger and Instagram applications.

Tsu's ouster stemmed from its practice of sharing ad revenue with its users. The payments are based on how many people read their posts.

Facebook decided Tsu's payments represented a financial incentive for people to share links on its network, something the Menlo Park,

California, company says it prohibits because it believes the practice pollutes its service with the digital rubbish known as "spam."

Sobczak contends Facebook hoped to destroy an upstart trying to popularize the idea that people should get paid for posts that help sell advertising. Facebook has built a highly profitable company with a market value of \$300 billion, partly because it doesn't pay for the material that keeps people and advertisers coming to its social network.

The two sides resolved their differences with a truce that required New York-based Tsu.co to remove a feature that allowed its users to share content directly to Facebook with one click on an app. Now Tsu.co users will have to go through several extra steps to transfer their posts to Facebook, or just copy and paste a link.

The concession prompted Facebook to restore the Tsu posts that had previously been erased from its social network and allow additional material from Tsu, which has nearly 5 million users. Tsu links can also be circulated on Instagram and Facebook's Messenger app.

Facebook spokeswoman Melanie Ensign described the circumstances surrounding Tsu's two-month ban as a "miscommunication."

Tsu user Claudia Everest said she was pleased to recover hundreds of her dog drawings that had been deleted from her Facebook page during the tiff between the two social networks. She fears the restored links to the sketches that sell for \$30 apiece won't attract as much traffic as they might otherwise have because they date back to months ago and are now buried in her Facebook feed.

Despite that frustration, Everest is pleased Facebook and Tsu have settled their differences.

"I believe that despite all the social networks looking to make money and therefore being in direct competition, there are benefits to everyone if there is a certain amount of sharing between sites," Everest wrote in Tuesday email.

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