

Reddit CEO says racism allowed, but not 'welcome,' on the site

April 16 2018, by Levi Sumagaysay, The Mercury News

Reddit has a history of allowing its users to say just about anything. On Wednesday, its CEO said racist language is just fine—officially giving license to the hatred that already lives on the site, which bills itself as the front page of the internet.

Now he's backpedaling a bit.

As [tech companies](#) face increasing pressure to police content on their platforms, Reddit CEO Steve Huffman said something to the equivalent of the old saying "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me."

In response to a question about whether slurs are against Reddit's rules, Huffman said: "It's not. On Reddit, the way in which we think about speech is to separate behavior from beliefs. This means on Reddit there will be people with beliefs different from your own, sometimes extremely so. When users actions conflict with our content policies, we take action."

That resonates in 2018, in the aftermath of the fatal Charlottesville white-supremacist march last year, and as racists feel more emboldened to say what they want online and offline.

Some Reddit users, aka Redditors, let him have it.

"You allowed r/the—donald to advertise for a fascist rally that

culminated in a deadly terror attack," wrote a Redditor called kitten cupcakes, referring to Charlottesville.

"Not all speech is 'valuable discourse,' and by letting it exist on your platform you are condoning its existence and assisting its propagation," user aYearofPrompts said.

And PostimusMaximus referred to Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg's Congressional grilling: "Zuckerberg is sitting over here getting grilled for not removing hate-speech fast enough due to AI limitations and yet you find yourself passing hate speech off as okay."

Thursday, Huffman updated his remarks, saying that "While racism itself isn't against the rules, it's not welcome here."

However, he seemed to stick to the spirit of his Wednesday response when he added: "I believe the best defense against racism and other repugnant views, both on Reddit and in the world, is instead of trying to control what people can and cannot say through rules, is to repudiate these views in a free conversation, and empower our communities to do so on Reddit."

Previously banned Reddit groups include ones called "CoonTown" and "raping women." Last year, the site banned two high-profile white nationalist groups. As I wrote then, it takes a lot to be banned from the pretty-much-anything-goes site, which has become a haven for hate. But "Alright" and "Alternativeright" were engaged in doxxing, or spreading people's personal information.

Huffman, who co-founded Reddit with Alexis Ohanian, became its CEO in 2015. When he took over after Ellen Pao's brief, tumultuous time as chief executive, Huffman pledged to ban the "dark side," which he defined as "communities whose purpose is reprehensible." He said then

that Reddit had "no obligation to support" such communities, which provides an online discussion board that has about 330,000 monthly users, more than 138,000 communities, and an average 14 billion views according to the About page on its website. It is said to be among the most visited sites on the internet.

Also this week, Reddit announced that it had banned nearly 1,000 suspected Russian troll accounts.

"We also did not detect any effective use of these accounts to engage in vote manipulation," Huffman said in a post Tuesday.

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