



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on May 25, 2016

Facebook Claims “Rogue Employees” May Have Been Biased Against Conservatives

Facebook has been fighting allegations that the social media site harbors a political bias against conservatives, but on Monday, Facebook announced that it would send employees for retraining and discontinue its practices that have been charged as politically biased.

The *Washington Times* reported, “The online giant denied that it’s shown ‘systematic political bias,’ but admitted employees played a bigger role than previously acknowledged in determining what news is highlighted in the trending topics section.”



Allegations of Facebook’s bias toward conservatives were levied earlier this month when Gizmodo revealed that former employees admitted that they regularly censored news considered “conservative,” which included denying placement of such news in the site’s “Trending Topics” section. Those employees also claimed they were instructed to list unpopular stories deemed significant by management in the “Trending Topics” section.

This has prompted an inquiry into the allegations of bias by the Senate Commerce Committee, chaired by Senator John Thune (R-S.D.).

Facebook denied the allegations, claiming that it adheres to “rigorous guidelines” that leave little room for bias. According to *USA Today*, Facebook utilized automated systems to identify what is considered popular, but then used a team of “news curators,” who are temporary contractors, to refine the list. As [noted](#) by *The New American*, “‘Refine’ is the key word. If Facebook really wanted to eliminate human bias, why allow ‘refinement,’ which could be nothing here but a euphemism for subjectivity? Why not just present what’s popular, period?”

TechCrunch’s Josh Constine made a similar observation when he wrote, “Facebook’s biggest problem may have been not realizing humans have biases — including political ones.”

According to the *Washington Times*, the “Trending Topics” section, launched in 2014, was based on an algorithm designed to pick out popular stories.

After originally denying the allegations, on Monday, the company admitted that employees may have played too significant a role in what followed.

“We currently use people to bridge the gap between what an algorithm can do today and what we hope it will be able to do in the future — to sort the meaningful trends from gibberish and duplicates, and to write headlines and descriptions in clear, natural-sounding language,” said Colin Stretch, the company’s general counsel.

Facebook claimed that it investigated seven of the allegations and determined that there was no evidence of bias. “Our investigation has revealed no evidence of systematic political bias in the selection



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or prominence of stories included in the Trending Topics feature. In fact, our analysis indicated that the rates of approval of conservative and liberal topics are virtually identical in Trending Topics,” Stretch said.

But Monday’s announcement seems to indicate that Facebook concedes that there was in fact some strategic bias taking place, a point observed by Senator Thune, who said that by admitting that employees played a larger role in identifying trending topics than was originally stated “lends credibility” to the accusations.

Facebook has announced it will re-train its employees and adopt new “controls and oversight” to minimize any opportunity for bias. Efforts to address the problem will include targeting areas “where human judgment is involved,” Stretch states. He also indicates that the company has already updated its guidelines and performed refresher training for all reviewers.

Still, despite Monday’s announcement, Facebook claims that if bias did take place, it was at the hands of “rogue employees” that likely discriminated unintentionally, but possibly could have acted maliciously.

Senator Thune welcomed Facebook’s announcement as a step in the right direction. “Facebook’s description of the methodology it uses for determining the trending content it highlights for users is far different from and more detailed than what it offered prior to our questions,” the South Dakota Republican said. “We now know the system relied on human judgment, and not just an automated process, more than previously acknowledged.”

Democrats accused Thune of wasting taxpayer dollars in his pursuit of the bias allegations but conservatives contend that too many Facebook users have admitted to relying on Facebook for at least some of their news for the allegations to be ignored.

The negative backlash following the Gizmodo report compelled Facebook to call a meeting with leading conservatives, including American Enterprise Institute President Arthur Brooks and Tea Party Patriots CEO Jenny Beth Martin, to address the concerns raised. According to Fox News’ Dana Perino, who was also in attendance, Facebook did admit in that meeting that they had a “trust problem” when it comes to conservatives.

“They acknowledged that they have a trust problem with a significant portion of their customer base and that they were trying to figure out a way, at least a first step, to open a dialogue so that they can try to fix it in the long run,” said Perino, speaking on the Fox News program *The Kelly File* following the meeting.



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