



**NATIONAL
CENTER ON
SEXUAL
EXPLOITATION**

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February 15, 2017

Jack Dorsey, Chief Executive Officer and Co-Founder
Twitter, Inc.
1355 Market Street
Suite 900
San Francisco, CA 94103

RE: 2017 Dirty Dozen List Notification

Dear Mr. Dorsey:

We are writing to express our deep concern regarding the distribution of hardcore, adult pornography, the frequent posting of child pornography, as well as the promotion of prostitution on Twitter. We ask that you implement aggressive measures to stop the distribution of such material by your users. We ask you to do this as a matter of conscience, to avoid the normalization and perpetuation of sexual exploitation.

Very soon, the National Center on Sexual Exploitation will publicly announce its annual "Dirty Dozen List," which names the major mainstream promoters of pornography and sexual exploitation in America. Twitter was previously named to this list in 2013. After careful consideration, we have decided to include Twitter on the 2017 Dirty Dozen List.

While many know Twitter as an innovator in social media communication, for years it has facilitated the distribution of copious amounts of hardcore pornography and aided in the promotion of prostitution. Media reports suggest that as many as 10 million Twitter accounts may include explicit sexual content.¹ Twitter's laissez-faire approach to sexually explicit content has gone on for far too long.

U.S. Congressman Chris Smith has urged that Twitter be investigated for its potential role in the sexual exploitation of women.² Twitter has also raised the ire of government officials in Korea who formed a special task force against online distribution of pornography. They were especially concerned about a police investigation which caught 117 people

¹ Garrett Sloane, "Here's Why Twitter's Porn Problem Freaked out Brands: 10 Million Accounts Could be Sharing NSFW Content." *Adweek* (May 11, 2015), <http://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/heres-why-twitters-porn-problem-freaked-out-brands-164649>.

² Jonathan Marina and Joe Deaux, "Congress to Launch Probe into Escort and Prostitution Services on Twitter." *The Street* (January 30, 2014), <https://www.thestreet.com/story/12277405/1/congress-to-launch-probe-into-escort-and-prostitution-services-on-twitter.html>.

Mr. Jack Dorsey
Page 2
February 15, 2017

distributing explicit sexual content via Twitter—33 of the distributors were elementary school children!¹

Included below is a list of news articles providing concrete illustrations of how Twitter has consistently failed to address the use of its site as a sexual exploitation marketplace.

“How innocent photos of children have been exploited on Twitter”

November 28, 2016

Discusses the presence of a network of individuals on Twitter who trade innocent images of children (for sexual purposes), as well as child sexual abuse images (i.e. child pornography).

“Upper Chi Man Gets Long Prison Term in Child-Porn Case”

Daily Times News

September 23, 2016

A man was arrested for possessing 147 images and 27 videos of child sexual abuse. He was traced after distributing child sexual abuse images via Twitter.

“From Prostitutes to Politics: Brothel Owner’s Bid Questioned”

The Seattle Times

September 13, 2016

Brothel owner Dennis Hof is reported to tweet pornography to his 20,000 Twitter followers.

“Australia’s Adult Industry Using Twitter for Marketing”

SBS.com

May 31, 2015

Pornography performers who had accounts cancelled on Facebook and Instagram, report that they use Twitter instead. As the article states, “Twitter is the social media tool most used by the adult industry, because it has no filters.”

“‘It’s Easier on Twitter’: Going Deep into Indonesia’s Online Sex Trade”

Channel NewsAsia

May 17, 2016

Reports on the sex trade in Indonesia and Twitter’s role as a platform for advertising prostitution.

“Exclusive: Anonymous Proves Twitter Does Little to Fight Child Pornography & ISIS”

February 2, 2016

Despite multiple reports from Twitter users, a Twitter account linked to child pornography remained up for several hours.

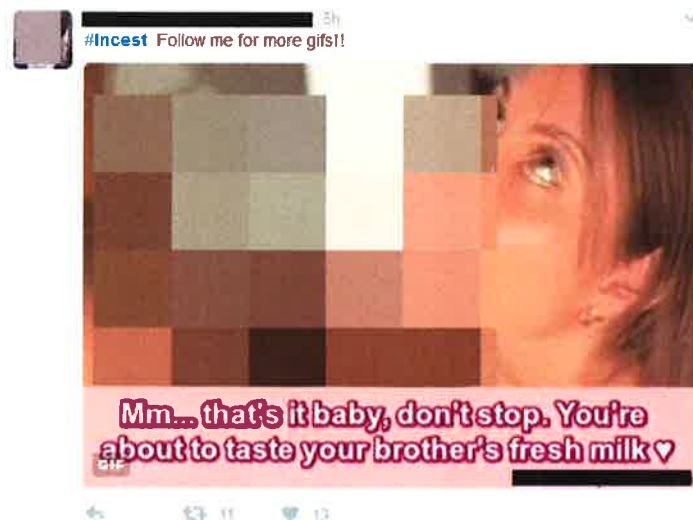
As these articles suggest, Twitter is a bastion of sexually explicit content of immense variety. Only a cursory survey of hashtags reveals copious amounts of pornography, links to pornography

¹ The Korea Herald, “Twitter May Face Probe over Pornography: Social Media Firm Seen Losing Ground in Local Market.” (February 1, 2015), <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20150201000186>.

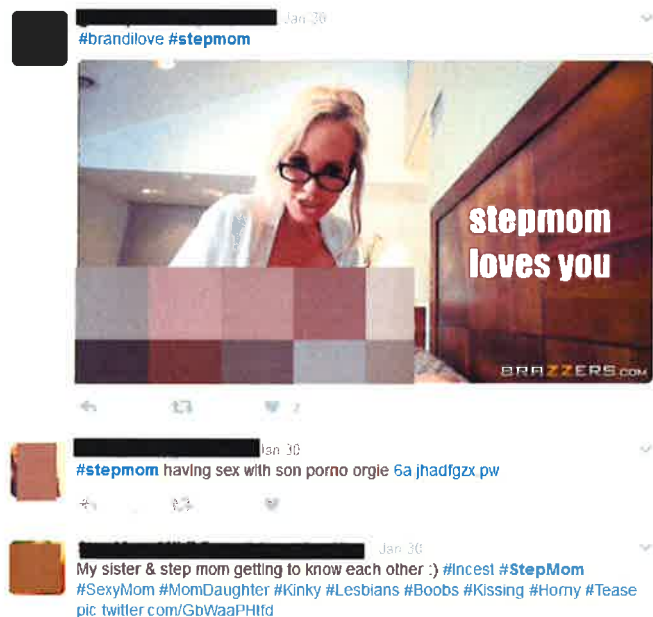
websites, links to virtual prostitution (commonly referred to as “cam girls”) websites, and prostitution sites (euphemistically referred to as “escorts”). Examples of pornographic hashtags include: #sex, #nsfw, #xxx, #adult, #f***, #hardcore, #ass, #anal, #pussy, #girls, #teen, #incest, #taboofamily, #tabootuesday, #stepmom, #milf, #bbw, #blowjob, #jizz, #cam, #live, #liveshow, #hireme, #cum, #cumslut, #swallowcum, #eatmycum, #fetish, #gangbang, #lactation, etc.

Here are just a few illustrations of the types of content we encountered on Twitter.

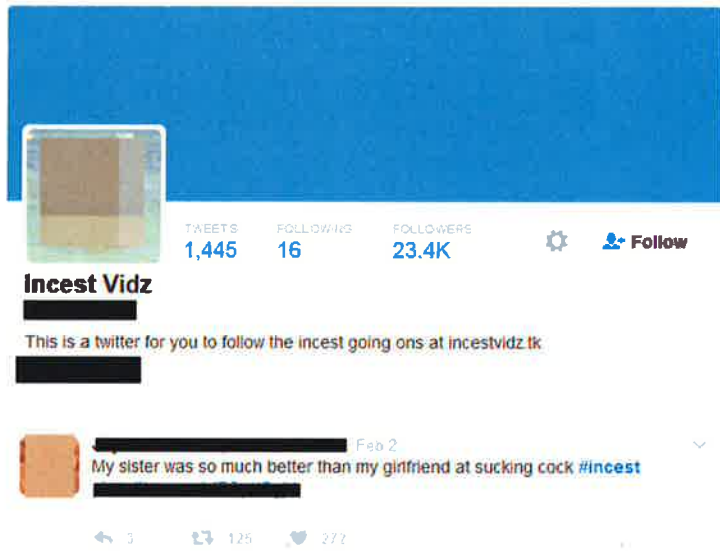
Incest-Themed Pornography



Depicts a woman giving oral sex.



Depicts a woman providing manual stimulation.



Twitter account featuring incest-themed pornography videos with more than 23,400 followers.

Rape-Themed Pornography





Sexualized Minors



Please note pornographic hashtags implying that these images of children are intended to be used for sexual stimulation.

Prostitution

The screenshot shows the Twitter profile for 'Wet n wild escorts'. The profile name is 'Wet n Wild Escorts' with a verified badge. The bio reads: '#TeamFollowBack #Follow2BeFollowed Wet n Wild Escorts is THE escort service provider in Chicago SINCE 1998! WE HAVE THE HOTTEST ESCORTS'. The profile statistics are: 1,393 tweets, 1,102 following, and 38.8K followers. There is a 'Follow' button. The header of the profile page is blue with the text 'Wet n wild escorts' in white. Below the header are navigation tabs: 'TOP', 'LATEST', 'PEOPLE', 'PHOTOS', 'VIDEOS', and 'MORE'. The 'PEOPLE' tab is selected. Below the tabs, there is a 'People' section with a 'View all' link. The main content area shows a grid of images, including a close-up of a woman's face and a grid of color swatches.

Organized sexual exploitation (commonly referred to as “prostitution”) account featuring nearly 39,000 Twitter followers.

The first screenshot shows a tweet from the account, posted 5 hours ago. The text of the tweet is: 'There is still some slots that need a good filling ladies available up until 8pm call 01908711821 #escorts'. Below the text is a large image of a woman's face, partially obscured by a grid of color swatches. The tweet has 1 reply, 1 retweet, and 2 likes.

The second screenshot shows another tweet from the account, posted 11 hours ago. The text of the tweet is: 'Any female escorts looking to work in Bedford I have a location get in touch if you want to know more #escorts'. Below the text is a small profile picture of a woman. The tweet has 1 reply, 1 retweet, and 10 likes.

Recruiting females for organized sexual exploitation.

Our society is struggling to cope with the impacts of multiple forms of sexual abuse and violence. Child sexual abuse (which is 167 times more common than autism),² adult sexual exploitation,³ racially-motivated sexual violence,⁴ sexual assault on college and university campuses,⁵ sexual trafficking of women and children,⁶ and incest⁷—these problems have not emerged from a vacuum, but flourish within the context of unprecedented access to hardcore pornographic material. Adult, hardcore pornography—with its raw, brutal, debasing, violent and hate-filled themes—exacerbates the deeply entrenched social ills mentioned above, and unleashes devastating impacts at the individual and societal level.

The harms of pornography are well documented. For instance, a growing body of neuroscience reveals that adults are developing addictions to pornography as pornography hijacks the brain's reward center in a way similar to drug addiction.⁸ A nationally representative online survey of 3,000 people reveals that nearly half of young people (ages 13-24) actively seek out pornography weekly or more often.⁹ This is especially troubling given that research shows that adolescents are more susceptible to forming addictions than adults because the dopamine neurons in their nucleus accumbens (i.e. the brain's pleasure center) are much more active and have an

² U.S. Department of Justice. "The National Strategy for Child Exploitation Prevention and Interdiction: A Report to Congress, (August 2010), <http://www.justice.gov/psc/docs/natstrategyreport.pdf> (accessed February 2, 2017); National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation, "Facts for Prevention: The Health Impact on Children & Youth," (January 2011), http://www.preventtogether.org/Resources/Documents/Health_Impact_on_Youth.pdf (accessed February 4, 2017).

³ Bryce Covert, "Women in Baltimore Public Housing Were Forced to Trade Sex for Basic Repairs." *Think Progress* (January 9, 2016), <http://thinkprogress.org/economy/2016/01/09/3737612/baltimore-housing-sex-settlement/> (accessed February 4, 2017); Melissa Farley and Anne Cotton, et al. "Prostitution and Trafficking in Nine Countries: An Update on Violence and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder." *Journal of Trauma Practice* 2, 3/4 (2003): 33-74.

⁴ Victoria Olive, "Sexual Assault against Women of Color." *Journal of Student Research* 1 (2012): 1-19; Gabby Bess, "Notre Dame Tutor Accused of Forcing Student into 'Racially Motivated' Sex." *Broadly*, (November 2, 2015), https://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/notre-dame-tutor-accused-of-forcing-student-into-racially-motivated-sex (accessed February 4, 2017); Associated Press, "Keller Teen Accused of Racially Motivated Sexual Assault of Teammate in Idaho High School Football Locker Room" (May 25, 2016), <http://sportsday.dallasnews.com/high-school/high-schools/2016/05/25/texas-teen-accused-racially-motivated-sexual-assault-teammate-idaho-football-locker-room> (accessed February 4, 2017).

⁵ The White House Council on Women and Girls. *Rape and Sexual Assault: A Renewed Call to Action*, (2014), https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/sexual_assault_report_1-21-14.pdf (accessed January 9, 2016).

⁶ Polaris. *2014 Statistics*, <https://polarisproject.org/sites/default/files/2014Statistics.pdf> (accessed January 9, 2016).

⁷ David Finkelhor & Anne Shattuck, "Characteristics of Crimes against Juveniles," Crimes Against Children Research Center (2012), http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/CV26_Revised_Characteristics_of_Crimes_against_Juveniles_5-2-12.pdf (accessed February 4, 2017).

⁸ Simone Kühn and Jürgen Gallinat, "Brain Structure and Functional Connectivity Associated with Pornography Consumption: The Brain on Porn," *JAMA Psychiatry* 71, no. 7 (2014): 827-834. Ji-Woo Seok and Jin-Hun Sohn, "Neural Substrates of Sexual Desire in Individuals with Problematic Hypersexual Behavior," *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience*, (November 30, 2015). Porn Study Critiques, "Current List of Brain Studies on Porn Users," (September 29, 2015) <http://pornstudycritiques.com/current-list-of-brain-studies-on-porn-users/> (accessed February 4, 2017).

⁹ Barna Group, "The Porn Phenomenon: A Comprehensive New Survey on Americans, the Church, and Pornography," (2016).

exaggerated plasticity in response to addictive stimulus.¹⁰ Thus, it can be said that a propensity for addiction is more strongly “hardwired” into the adolescent brain.¹¹

A recent survey found that 27% of young adults report first viewing pornography before puberty.¹² This is alarming given that Internet pornography consumption by adolescents is associated with risky sexual behavior (that can have profoundly adverse effects), such as anal and group sex, hookups, multiple sexual partners, and substance use during sex.¹³

Such outcomes are not surprising in light of how the human brain develops. Research shows that adolescents are not as readily able as adults to access their frontal lobes—the portion of the brain that controls impulses and allows for rapid, smart decision making.¹⁴ Moreover, multiple neurological studies contribute to the view that pornography use interferes with “working memory” performance, thus inhibiting the judgment and decision making functions of the prefrontal cortex.¹⁵

Moreover, pornography is linked to sexual violence among adolescents and adults. A nationally representative survey of pornography use among youth aged 9–17 found that those with increased exposure to Internet pornography were significantly more likely to report physical and sexual victimization.¹⁶ A separate study of 14- to 19-year-olds found that females who watched pornographic videos were at significantly greater likelihood of being victims of sexual harassment or sexual assault.¹⁷ A study of 804 Italian males and females aged 14 to 19, found that males who viewed pornography were significantly more likely to report having sexually harassed a peer or forcing someone to have sex.¹⁸

¹⁰ Frances E. Jensen with Amy Ellis Nutt, *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist's Survival Guild to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2015).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Barna Group, “News Conference on Barna’s New Study: ‘The Porn Phenomenon,’” (January 15, 2016) <https://www.barna.org/blog/culture-media/barna-group/porn-press-conference#.VrS9OrSJndI>, (accessed February 4, 2017).

¹³ Debra Braun-Courville and Mary Rojas, “Exposure to Sexually Explicit Web Site and Adolescent Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors 45 (2009): 156-162.

¹⁴ Frances E. Jensen with Amy Ellis Nutt, *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist's Survival Guild to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2015).

¹⁵ C. Laier, F.P. Schulte, and M. Brand, “Pornographic Picture Processing Interferes with Working Memory Performance,” *Journal of Sex Research* 50, no. 7 (2013): 642–652; C. Laier, M. Pawlikowski, and M. Brand, “Sexual Picture Processing Interferes with Decision-Making under Ambiguity,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 43, no. 3 (2014): 473–483.

¹⁶ Michele L. Ybarra and Kimberly Mitchell, “Exposure to Internet Pornography among Children and Adolescents: A National Survey,” *CyberPsychology & Behavior* 8, no. 5 (2005): 473–486.

¹⁷ Silvia Bonino, Silvia Ciairano, Emanuela Rabagliette, and Elena Cattelino, “Use of Pornography and Self-Reported Engagement in Sexual Violence among Adolescents,” *European Journal of Developmental Psychology* 3, no. 3 (2006):265-288.

¹⁸ Silvia Bonino, Silvia Ciairano, Emanuela Rabagliette, and Elena Cattelino, “Use of Pornography and Self-Reported Engagement in Sexual Violence among Adolescents,” *European Journal of Developmental Psychology* 3, no. 3 (2006):265-288.

Building on the link between pornography use and sexual violence, a recent meta-analysis of 22 studies from seven countries provides clear evidence confirming that pornography exposure is significantly associated with sexual aggression.¹⁹ As the authors state, “the accumulated data leave little doubt that, on the average, individuals who consume pornography more frequently are more likely to hold attitudes conducive to sexual aggression and engage in actual acts of sexual aggression than individuals who do not consume pornography or who consume pornography less frequently.”²⁰

Further, older adolescents who use pornography are more likely to be attracted to 13- or 14-year olds,²¹ and the earlier college men were exposed to pornography the more likely they are to have engaged in nonconsensual sex.²² Fraternity men who consumed *mainstream* pornography expressed a greater intent to commit rape if they knew they would not be caught than those who did not consume pornography. Those who consumed *sadomasochistic* pornography expressed significantly less willingness to intervene in situations of sexual violence, greater beliefs in rape myths, and greater intent to commit rape. In addition, among those who consumed *rape-themed* pornography, the researchers described “serious effects” including less bystander willingness to intervene, greater belief in rape myth, and greater intent to commit rape.²³ In other words, there was *no* type of pornography that did not result in a greater intent to commit rape by a user if they knew they would not be caught.

Today, pornography is pervasive and it is damaging countless lives. Its role in shaping the attitudes and behaviors that fuel the crisis of sexual assault on college campuses, sexting scandals, revenge pornography, sex trafficking, child sexual abuse, compulsive pornography consumption, and more is clear. As a result, our nation is now suffering from a public health crisis fueled by the widespread distribution of adult, hardcore pornography. The term “public health crisis” is used to broadly define both physical and social problems—from cigarette smoking to bullying—and it unequivocally applies to pornography because pornography is a serious, harmful problem that affects individuals and groups beyond their capacity to correct alone.

The same could be said of cigarettes and the tobacco industry in the 1950s. But as we learned through experience, a public health model that unites government officials, public education efforts, health professionals, and a concerned public, can greatly reduce the impact of a toxic industry. The porn industry of today is simply the big tobacco of the past.

¹⁹ Paul J. Wright, Robert S. Tokunaga, and Ashley Kraus. “A Meta-Analysis of Pornography Consumption and Actual Acts of Sexual Aggression in General Population Studies.” *Journal of Communication*, (December 29, 2015): 1-23.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Kristinn Henga, Svein Mossige, and Lars Wichstrom, “Older Adolescents’ Positive Attitudes toward Younger Adolescents as Sexual Partners,” *Adolescence* 39, no. 156, (2004): 627-651.

²² Mary Anne Layden, unpublished data, 2015.

²³ John Foubert, Matt Brosi, and R. Bannon, “Pornography Viewing among Fraternity Men: Effects on Bystander Intervention, Rape Myth Acceptance & Behavioral Intent to Commit Sexual Assault,” *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 18, no. 4 (2011): 212-231.

Mr. Jack Dorsey
Page 10
February 15, 2017

Twitter is now faced with a decision concerning its role in this crisis. Will it play the part of Big Tobacco and continue allowing unfettered access to materials that poison human lives, or will it accept its social responsibility to respond to this problem?

We understand that in the past Twitter has taken steps to curb the presence of revenge porn on its site. Recent news reports also suggest that Twitter is now working to abate the rampant cyberbullying and harassment that takes place on its platform. These are encouraging and positive steps. However, much further robust leadership and action is required to address the issues outlined above. Unfortunately, at present Twitter's brand remains inextricably linked with and party to sexual exploitation.

Therefore, we request that Twitter begin filtering hardcore pornography and prostitution related accounts, tweets, and hashtags from its site. The overwhelming job of reporting obscene tweets and accounts promoting sexual exploitation should not be left to Twitter users. Hashtags that serve as repositories for hardcore pornography and forums for prostitution or sexual abuse should not be tolerated. Moreover, Twitter's media policy which leaves it to people distributing pornographic material to mark their media settings as "sensitive" is naïve at best. It is Twitter's duty to create a safe online space that protects the dignity and wellbeing of its online community and society at-large.

We hope you are aware that there have been remarkable advances in filter technology. Ronald DeHaas, President of Covenant Eyes, Inc., an Internet accountability and filtering company, confirms that when today's filters are used to identify and block pornography, they are highly effective. In the Internet filtering industry, instances of overblocking are referred to as "false positives." DeHaas reports that false positives have become so extremely rare as to be inconsequential. His company's Internet filtering system is more than 99.9% successful in avoiding overblocking sites rated as pornography. Moreover, within the Internet filtering industry false negatives (i.e. underblocking) are more common than false positives, meaning that any error in the technology is more likely to result in a person accessing pornography than not being able to access legitimate content.

Furthermore, state-of-the-art image recognition technology, for both still images and videos, has been developed by Covenant Eyes and was released by the company in 2016. This technology uses convolutional neural networks that "learn" to recognize pornography through artificial intelligence. Similarity to pornography is determined on a scale of 0 to 100—zero being pornography, 100 being totally "clean." When the threshold is set below 20, accuracy for false positives exceeds 99.5%, thereby effectively filtering against true, hardcore pornography while not blocking legitimate content. Thus, we believe technology exists which could be adapted to Twitter's platform allowing for highly accurate filtering of hardcore pornography and prostitution related material.

Major corporations such as Omni Hotels, Marriott International, Hilton Worldwide, Walmart, Facebook, and others have eliminated or are eliminating pornography from their business models.

Mr. Jack Dorsey
Page 11
February 15, 2017

This is Twitter's invitation to do likewise, and in so doing assume a leadership position within the social media business sector.

All girls, boys, women, and men have a natural human dignity and thus a right to live lives free from sexual exploitation. Pornography and prostitution are degrading, dehumanizing, exploitive, and a violation of this right. Pornography and prostitution are serial attacks on human dignity, identity, and worth. NCOSE exists to make society aware of these and other forms of sexual exploitation, to equip individuals and families to overcome and protect against those harms, and to advocate that all laws defending the right to be free from pornography are vigorously enforced. The world is now suffering from the effects of widespread sexual exploitation and Twitter has an historic opportunity to play an important role in stopping it.

We hope Twitter will rise to this challenge and meet with us to discuss ways by which it can become a corporate leader in the fight for a world free from sexual exploitation.

Sincerely,



Patrick Trueman
President & CEO



Dawn Hawkins
Senior Vice President & Executive Director

Enclosures

cc: Omid Kordestani, Executive Chairman, Board of Directors
Peter Fenton, Board of Directors
Martha Lane Fox, Board of Directors
Hugh F. Johnston, Board of Directors
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The Honorable Christopher Smith, U.S House of Representatives