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## COMMENT: Facebook's policy on Holocaust denial is wrong

55% of Pocket-lint readers say Facebook should censor Holocaust denial

by Duncan Geere published on 15 May 2009

Should Facebook automatically delete all Holocaust denial groups? That's the question we asked Pocket-lint readers this week, after a storm erupted over Facebook refusing to cave to a Dallas attorney who's demanding that Holocaust denial pages be removed.

Tesco agrees, and has pulled its advertising on the site. The shopping giant will now only advertise on Facebook's homepage and profile pages, as it doesn't want its marketing next to such objectionable content.

It turns out that 55% of you think that the social networking site is doing the wrong thing in standing with the denialists. A fairly even split, with the rest of you presumably taking the "free speech" argument that Facebook's been trotting out.

Facebook agrees that Holocaust denial is offensive and objectionable, but it doesn't agree that people don't have the right to discuss such things on its network. The site says it wants to "be a place where people can discuss all kinds of ideas, including controversial ones".

Facebook is bound by the laws of the countries that it operates in, and 13 countries have declared Holocaust denial illegal. In those countries, the site blocks the content, putting IP-address-linked bans on residents viewing it. In other countries, it remains viewable.

However its terms of service, in section three, clearly bans "hateful" and "threatening" content. The site has removed content in the past posted by Italian Neo-Nazis and removed a page titled

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...cont.

"Isle of Man KKK", created by Manx residents.

So why isn't Holocaust denial banned on all of Facebook? It's clearly hateful, and regularly leads directly to threatening behaviour.

Other sites have enacted policies against it. After high-profile complaints in 1999, eBay banned the sale of Nazi memorabilia and now specifically prohibits "Holocaust denial books" from being bought and sold on the site.

Similarly, MySpace moderators have been given special instructions to promptly remove anti-semitic and other derogatory comments from the website, and ban regular offenders.

Facebook has a moral responsibility to protect its users. It's great that it provides a platform for people with unusual views and interests to meet each other, who might not otherwise be able to communicate, but that platform must be policed. Parts of the site can't be allowed to devolve into a dark corner of the Internet where hatred and extreme views are allowed to fester.