Recommendation: Sale of Historical Artifacts
Issue

Our policy prohibits the sale of stolen historical artifacts, but we have not, to date, prohibited the sale or exchange of historical artifacts in organic content. This is because such items hold significant personal and cultural value to certain communities and can be sold and acquired legally across various jurisdictions. We recognize, however, that the sale of historical artifacts can result in harmful behaviour, and we would like to establish clear parameters to distinguish what should and should not be sold or traded on the platform.
Sale of Historical Artifacts

Overview

**Recommendation:** Adopt a policy that prohibits the sale of historical artifacts

**External Outreach:** 13 External Engagements

**Working Groups:** 6 XFN Working Groups
Sale of Historical Artifacts

Status Quo

- Under our Coordinating Harm & Promoting Crime policy, we prohibit and remove the sale of historical artifacts when it is clear that such items have been looted.
- However, our current Regulated Goods policy does not prohibit organic content that attempts to sell, gift, exchange, or transfer historical artifacts.
Sale of Historical Artifacts

Research Findings

• Many commentators describe the global market in antiquities as a ‘grey market’ as it is often difficult to get a clear idea on networks of exchange and multiple routes by which objects have circulated from the field to market

• There is a good chance that historical artifacts traded online are either illegal or fake, as an estimated 80% of antiquities have ‘sketchy provenances’

• There is criticism that Facebook’s policy has led the platform to become a digital black market where users buy and sell illicit antiquities originating from conflict zones

Policy Relevance: Policy should develop more specific criteria for sale of historical artifacts giving more attention to items that might have been associated with illegal or criminal activity and terrorism

Sources: Mackenzie & Yates 2017; Stevenson 2016; Fawcett 2017; Al-Azm & Paul 2019
Sale of Historical Artifacts
Proposed Definition

What is considered a historical artifact?

These are rare items of significant historical, cultural, or scientific value. This applies specifically to:

- Products of archaeological discoveries and excavations
- Antiquities such as ancient funerary items, ancient tombstones, ancient coins, engraved seals, etc.
- Human remains and mummified body parts
- Ancient scrolls and manuscripts
Sale of Historical Artifacts

Maintain status quo

Continue to remove the sale of historical artifacts where it is clear that the artifacts have been looted

No action taken on:
• Content depicting the sale, exchange, or attempt to purchase historical artifacts
• Content encouraging contact to facilitate the sale, exchange, or purchase of historical artifacts

**Pros**

- **Operability**: No additional operational needs

**Cons**

- **Safety**: Does not address the concerns around illicit trade
Sale of Historical Artifacts
Option 1: Examples

Allow

Sale of Syrian tombstones

Allow

Sale of ancient Persian rugs

Allow

Sale of Native American Arrowheads

Pa arrowheads
$40
Lehighton, PA
Pay 4 bucks each other buy them all for only 30$
Sale of Historical Artifacts
Enforce policy on an escalations-only basis

Remove:
- Content depicting the sale, exchange, or attempt to purchase historical artifacts
- Content encouraging contact to facilitate the sale, exchange, or purchase of historical artifacts

Pros
- **Operability:**
  - Reduced risk of overenforcement
  - Organizations who are experts in the field could potentially flag content directly to us

Cons
- **Operability:** Potential delays in actioning violating content due to escalations-only enforcement
- **Safety:** May not adequately address the concerns around illicit trade because of escalation-only nature of policy
Sale of Historical Artifacts
Option 2: Examples

Remove

Sale of Syrian tombstones

Remove

Sale of ancient Persian rugs

Allow

Native American Arrowheads

Pa arrowheads

$40

Lehighton, PA

Pay 4 bucks each other buy them all for only 30 $
Sale of Historical Artifacts
Enforce policy via scaled review

Remove:
• Content depicting the sale, exchange, or attempt to purchase historical artifacts
• Content encouraging contact to facilitate the sale, exchange, or purchase of historical artifacts

Pros
• **Operability:** Reduced enforcement time due to scaled review

Cons
• **Operability:** Increased risk of overenforcement
• **Safety:** Policy + enforcement may drive trade underground
Sale of Historical Artifacts

Option 3: Examples

Remove
Sale of Syrian tombstones

Remove
Sale of ancient Persian rugs

Allow
Sale of Native American Arrowheads

Pa arrowheads
$40
Lehighton, PA
Pay 4 bucks each other buy them all for only 30 $
Sale of Historical Artifacts

External Outreach

- Experts are generally concerned about unregulated sales being allowed on our platform
- Categorization of sales would be problematic as establishing provenance, age, or other key factors is challenging even for experts
- Experts think that removed content should be preserved in order to avoid deleting evidence of war crimes
- Minority view: banning such content will force the deals underground
Sale of Historical Artifacts

External Outreach

Status Quo: Do not limit unless clearly looted

Industry Expert (EMEA)

Remove sales on an escalations-only basis of items prohibited under international law and those without proof of ownership or export license

Academic (EMEA)

Government Agency (LATAM)

Archeology Museum (LATAM)

Nonprofit Org (APAC)

Academic (NA)

Academic (APAC)

Nonprofit Org (EMEA)

Government Agency (LATAM)

Academic (EMEA)

Archeology Org (EMEA/NA)

Civil Society (EMEA)

Remove all content related to sales of historical artifacts
facebook