



UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS  
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IN REPLY REFER TO:  
May 29, 2013

The Honorable Jackie Speier  
U.S. House of Representatives  
211 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515-4183

Dear Representative Speier:

Thank you for your correspondence of May 8, 2013, regarding the deplorable images in social media that denigrate women in the U.S. Marine Corps. We share your indignation; I am responding on behalf of the Secretary of Defense. These depictions are neither official Marine Corps communications nor reflective of the U.S. Marine Corps' sentiments toward women.

Social Media is a valuable communication medium, but it also provides abuse opportunities. It helps us connect and share ideas and information with family and friends in ways we never thought possible just ten years ago. On the other hand, it provides opportunities for unscrupulous individuals to publicize any content whatsoever, regardless of tastefulness, discrediting content, or operational security. Recognizing the benefits and risks of social media, the Marine Corps published its guidance for social media use in 2010 as well as the requirement to educate, train, and promote awareness for the responsible and effective use of internet capabilities. In 2011, I promulgated a proactive social media policy handbook and actionable regulations concerning unofficial internet posting. All regulations and guidance are publically available online, and to date, the Marine Corps' effort toward responsible social media use remains unparalleled.

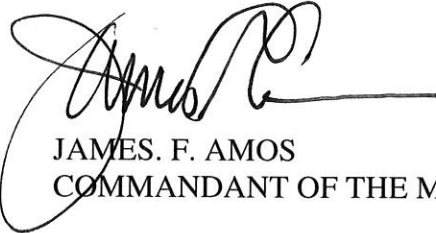
Recognizing the spectrum between proper social media use and abuse, our policy encourages access yet prohibits participation that discredits the Marine Corps or undermines good order and discipline. In our view, Marines are responsible for all content they publish on social networking sites, blogs, or other websites. For enforcement, we rely upon investigative bodies such as Naval Criminal Investigative Service, the Criminal Investigative Division of the Provost Marshall, the Inspector General, and the local command. Since 2009, for example, the Marine Corps Inspector General (IG) has received 166 complaints regarding social media misuse in general and has 14 open cases as of the date of this letter. The IG also actively inspects units throughout the Marine Corps to verify command compliance with our social media policies and training requirements. The Marine Corps Cybersecurity Assessment Team (MCCAT) also conducts weekly assessments on a discreet number of social media sites in order to protect against senior official impersonators and to prevent damage to individual and institutional reputations. Specific authorities govern and narrowly tailor the MCCAT's actions. Additionally, our Trademark and Licensing Office monitors the internet for service discrediting material that might violate Marine Corps protected trademarks. Lastly, in an effort to restrict the Marines' access to unscrupulous sites, we are currently examining whether the Armed Forces Disciplinary Control Board procedures found at 32 C.F.R 631 as well as other regulations that place business establishments "off-limits" can legally and effectively place web pages and sites "off limits."

When we become aware of any service discrediting material in the public forum and can identify the responsible individual, we use our available resources to disassociate the Marine Corps from the material and take appropriate individual and permissible commercial corrective actions. In June 2010, for example, the Marine Corps took formal administrative action upon a Sergeant and Lance Corporal who posted Facebook remarks that were disparaging to women. In April 2013, we took formal administrative action upon 4 Marines who also had posted service discrediting content on Facebook.

Notwithstanding the limited success, enforcing social media policies has been challenging for myriad reasons. The anonymous nature of social media, the use of online pseudonyms, and the magnitude of available sites present key challenges to curtailing inappropriate postings. The potential for inappropriate or service discrediting internet postings extends beyond a handful of sites like Facebook, Tumblr, MySpace, and Youtube, spanning across the breadth of public expression and commerce at large. Moreover, for our IG in particular, social media complaints reflect only 2.46% of the total IG complaints received since 2009. As a result, our IG lacks the resources and infrastructure to actively and consistently monitor the countless, ever-evolving social media sites. Where online activity is part of a complaint, we nonetheless make our best effort to identify the individuals responsible.

Comprehensively addressing inappropriate online activity and proactively enforcing our standards in social cyberspace requires manpower and technological resources beyond our current capabilities. Overwhelmingly, the Marine Corps succeeds in transforming society's young men and women into courageous defenders of our freedom. Facilitating this transformation is a daunting task, and Marines by and large possess and act in accordance with our values of honor, courage, and commitment. It is saddening that social media, a tool that can be used for good, has armed a vocal minority with an anonymous and irretrievable loudspeaker. In addition to our enduring efforts, progress in this arena will require legislation that provides adequate tools to practically and lawfully curtail social media misuse.

I thank you for your continued support of our service members throughout the Department of Defense. Please let me know if you have any further questions.



JAMES. F. AMOS  
COMMANDANT OF THE MARINE CORPS