

# Censorship Revealed

The impact of digital suppression and  
censorship of women's health

How this happens on social media and  
very large online platforms (VLOPs)

Recommendations for change.

June 2025

CensHERship

in partnership with The Case For Her



# About the authors

## CensHERship



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Founded in 2024 by Clio Wood and Anna O'Sullivan, CensHERship's mission is to level the playing field for women's health businesses, charities, and content creators across online platforms - from social media to financial services. Our research has been featured on BBC Radio and in publications including The Times, The Guardian and Wired magazine.

## The Case For Her



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The Case for Her is a global blended-finance investment portfolio addressing the key women's health issues of menstruation and female sexual health through grants, investments, convenings, and advocacy. Founded in 2017, The Case for Her brings together over 30 years of experience working and investing in women's health and rights. This dynamic and flexible portfolio spans the globe and includes investments in product companies, tech innovations, research initiatives, and grassroots organizations.

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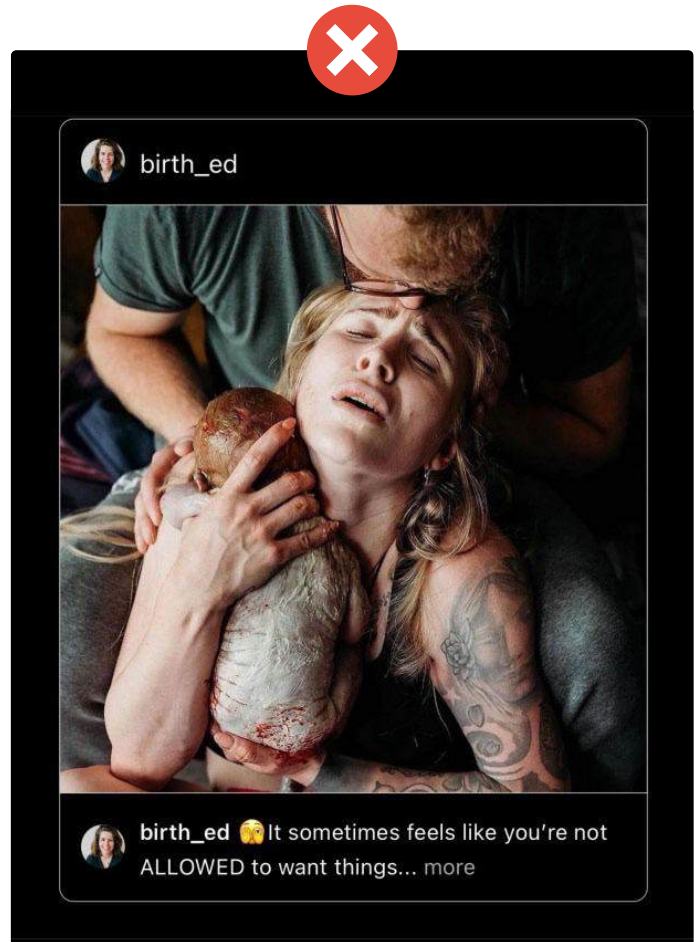
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# Executive Summary

## **Censorship Revealed** uncovers a growing, deeply under-addressed crisis:

the routine digital suppression and censorship of women's health content on very large online platforms (VLOPs) including major social media platforms.

Through original research, firsthand accounts, and formal complaints under the [EU Digital Services Act](#), this white paper documents how medically accurate, non-sexual content about menstruation, menopause, fertility, postpartum care, and sexual wellbeing is systematically removed, restricted, or down-ranked — even when created by qualified experts.



*An image removed from a birth educator instagram account*

## Key findings

**95% of women's health creators** surveyed in 2024–25 reported censorship on platforms including Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, X, Google, Amazon, YouTube, Pinterest and LinkedIn.

**Self-censorship is widespread**, with over half of respondents altering their language or imagery to avoid takedowns — reinforcing stigma and limiting public understanding.

**Platform moderation systems are inconsistent**, opaque and biased, disproportionately penalising women's health content while allowing equivalent male health content.

**The consequences** are economic, social, and public health-related. Startups report losing revenue, credibility, and reach; public access to vital health information is being obstructed; and deep-rooted taboos are being inadvertently reinforced by tech.

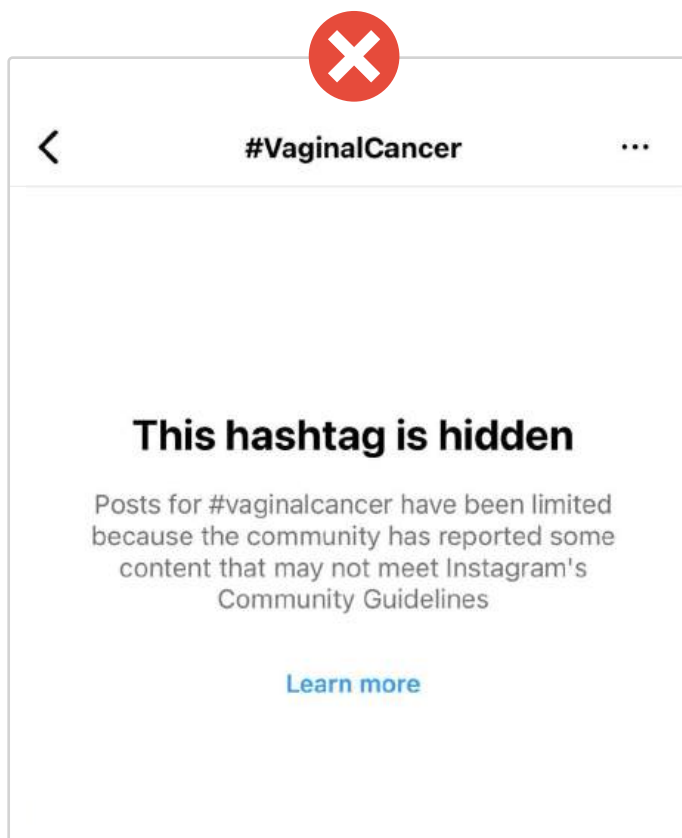
# Recommendations

**Platforms and their algorithms** must treat medically-accurate women's health content as essential — not explicit — and ensure fair, transparent, and context-sensitive moderation.

**Policymakers** must enforce gender-sensitive digital regulations and ensure women's health businesses have equal opportunities to thrive in the digital economy.

**Investors, media, and corporations** must help normalize women's health conversations and acknowledge the urgent business case for tackling online bias.

When women's health is silenced online, we all lose. But by taking action now — across platforms, policy, and practice — we can create a digital world that empowers, informs, and includes everyone. It's a public health and economic imperative.



*Gynaecological cancer charity The Eve Appeal has flagged issues with banned hashtags.*



*An image approved on Playboy Instagram feed - 1 January 2024*

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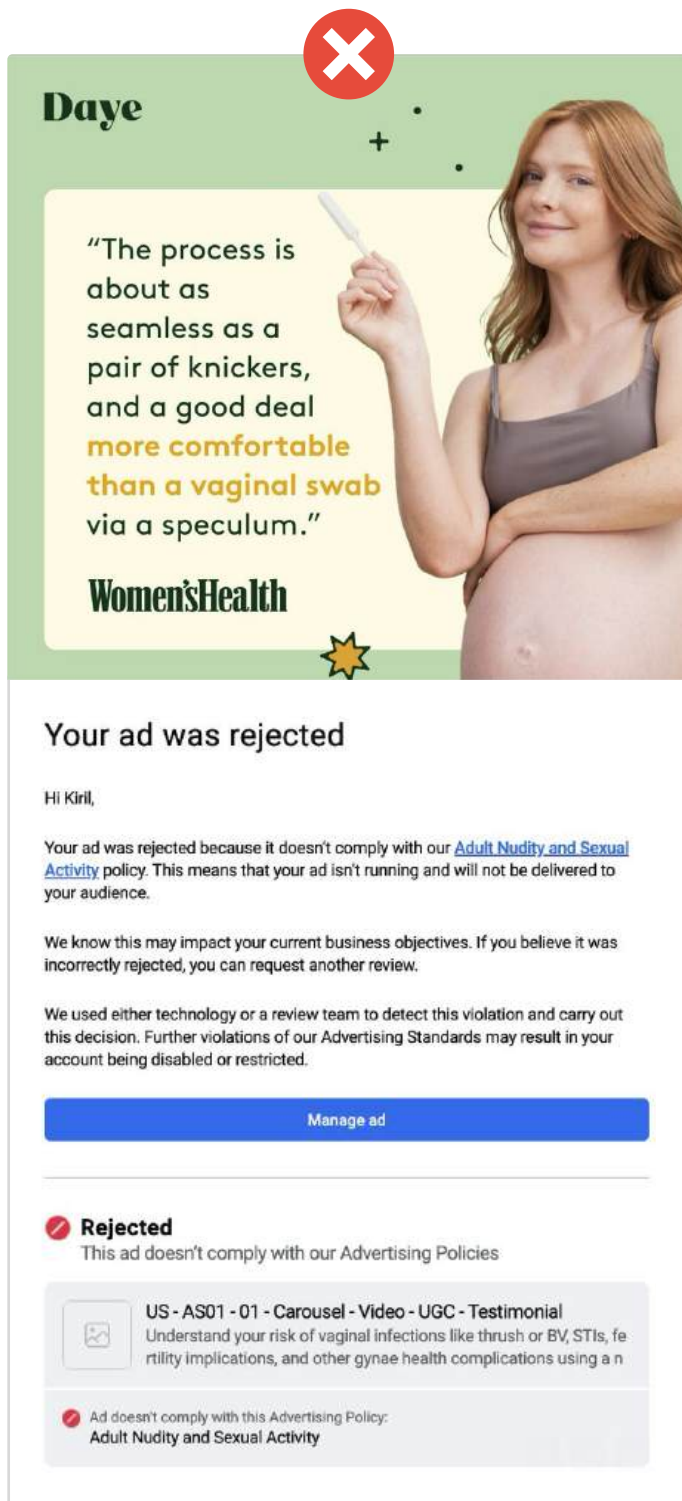
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# Introduction



Picture this: a social media advertisement for a diagnostic tampon, featuring an image of a woman and the word *vaginal* is rejected for 'adult nudity and sexual activity.'

Or a female libido product which can't be promoted since low libido is flagged as 'sexual content' — while ads to help men have 'spontaneous sex' are routinely approved.

And then there's the gynaecological cancer charity which discovered the hashtag #vaginalcancer was banned on Instagram.

These are just a few of the hundreds of real-life examples of censorship on very large online digital platforms (VLOPs) that CensHERship has collated from businesses, charities, and content creators working in women's health during 2024 and 2025.

As you'll discover in this report, our research has found that suppression of women's health content online is a growing problem, driven by a complex mix of factors: algorithmic bias, the persistent

*An advertisement on Meta for a diagnostic tampon rejected for 'adult nudity and sexual content'*

## Censorship Revealed

sexualisation of the female body, outdated moderation policies, and deep-rooted societal stigma around topics like menstruation, menopause, fertility, and sexual wellbeing.

When censorship is considered in this larger context, it appears to be part of a concerted effort aimed at suppressing access to women's health information in general.

But while the causes are complex, the consequences are crystal clear: when content that names female body parts or discusses women's health is restricted or removed, it creates both a public health and economic issue.

Digital suppression and censorship stifles growth, slows innovation, and blocks access to vital care and information.

This is more than a fairness issue. Addressing digital suppression and censorship in women's health is an urgent opportunity to unlock economic growth, drive healthcare innovation, and improve access to vital, life-changing information — for everyone.

**In this white paper, we present research and insights from CensHERship and The Case for Her and explore:**

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**Why digital suppression in women's health exists — and why it matters to everyone**

**The different forms this censorship takes**

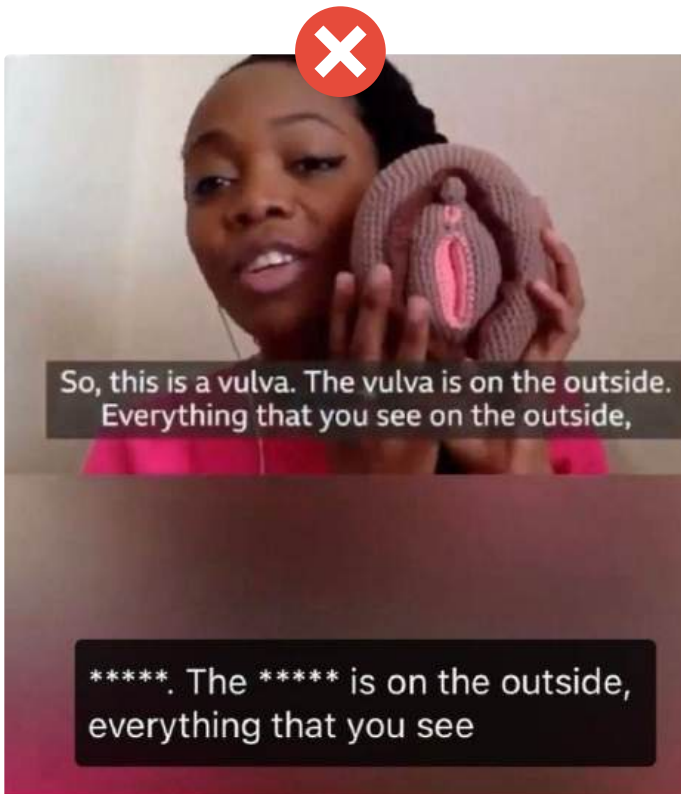
**Real-world examples from female-founded health brands, charities and content creators**

**What must change — and how.**

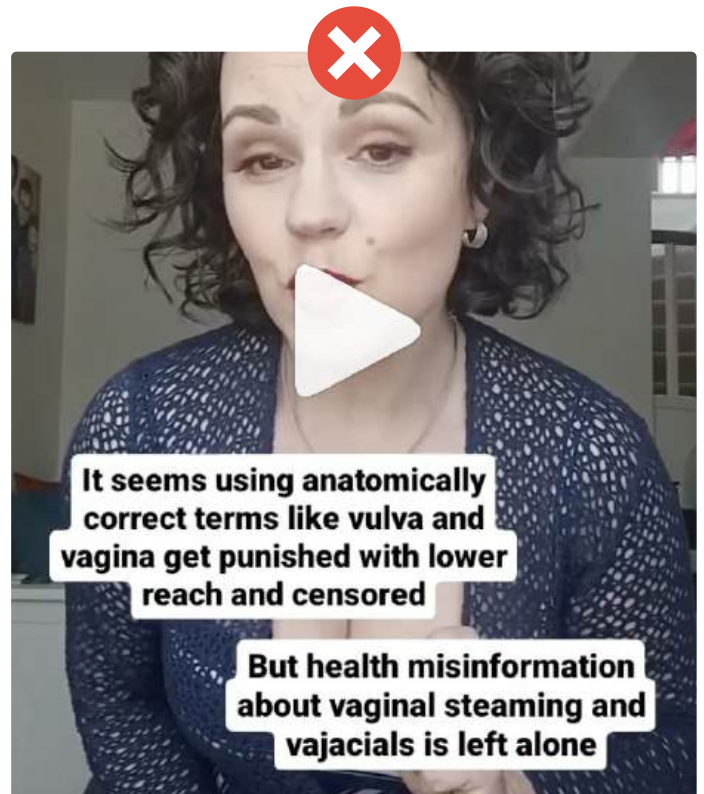
# What is digital suppression and censorship in women's health?

Digital censorship in women's health refers to the suppression, removal, restriction, or penalisation of content related to female health across major online platforms including social media.

This includes medically accurate content created by qualified experts, and also personal, lived experiences of women's health. The types of content may include educational posts on menstruation, menopause, or hormone health, ad campaigns for health and wellbeing products, non-sexual imagery showing or referencing parts of the female body, and even personal stories about miscarriage, childbirth, breastfeeding, breast cancer or chronic conditions.



*Dr Aziza Sesay's educational posts are flagged for breaching 'community guidelines' and captions are routinely asterisked.*



*Dr Philippa Kaye has flagged issues with the use of anatomically correct terms*

# How digital suppression and censorship happens:

Complex algorithms and moderation processes determine what happens to any piece of content on social media, both pre- and post-publication.

**There are four different types of digital suppression and censorship that creators might experience:**

## Post removals and ad rejections

Content is taken down or blocked from being published. In many cases, the platform cites violations of “adult content” or “nudity” policies — even when the content is medically-framed and clearly non-sexual.

## Shadowbanning and suppression by the algorithm

Content remains live but is hidden from followers, deprioritised in feeds, or made unsearchable. Users are usually able to see if their account is shadowbanned, but often they are not informed, making the censorship both invisible and impactful.

## Restricted promotion of women’s health products

Similar to shadowbanning but applicable on paid content, this is where ad performance is throttled, even when their male-focused counterparts are approved with similar messaging.

## Keyword and hashtag suppression

Terms like vagina, nipple, libido, or menopause can trigger moderation filters that automatically restrict reach or block ad delivery. This is even when clearly used in a medical or education context. This also applies to hashtags where certain hashtags are ‘banned’ from use<sup>1</sup> and content using them cannot be displayed. Examples include #vaginalcancer and #vagina - the latter of which was reinstated after a spokesperson for Meta said it was ‘temporarily blocked by mistake’ and has now been restored.

# Key insights on digital suppression and censorship

**CensHERship has spent more than a year gathering data and feedback from women’s health content creators to understand their experiences of using social media and online platforms.**

We launched an open call survey on 1 February 2024. This was initially open for three weeks and resulted in 54 responses from organisations and individuals. We have since left the survey open to continue to collect evidence.<sup>2</sup> Responses now stand at 115 (as of 15 May 2025). *More information about our methodology is provided in an appendix to this report.*

What follows is a summary of our latest data from brands, creators, medical professionals, charities, consumers, and health/wellbeing professionals.<sup>3</sup>

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**95 %**

Respondents have reported censorship.

**38 %**

Experienced 10 or more incidents in the past 12 months.

**53 %**

Respondents now self-censor content.

**90 %**

Experienced an issue on Instagram.

**52 %**

Experienced an issue on Facebook.

**32 %**

Experienced an issue on TikTok.

**“We have to write things like s3x, v4gina etc in organic content to stop the algorithms from blocking content.”**

— Head of brand, women’s health.

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## Key insights explored:

**1/ This is a large-scale, still-growing problem that impacts businesses, individuals, charities, and medical professionals.**

**95% of respondents** to our 2024/5 survey experienced at least one instance of censorship of women’s health or sexual wellbeing content online in the past year.

**Nearly 4 in 10 (38%)** reported 10 or more incidents in just 12 months.

**2/ Issues are most apparent on Meta (Instagram or Facebook)**

**90% said** they have had issues on Instagram

**Over half (52%)** had experienced an issue on Facebook

**Nearly a third (32%)** on Tik tok

**15%** on YouTube

**11%** on LinkedIn

We’ve also uncovered examples of censorship on very large online platforms (VLOPs) such as Amazon and Google. *(See case studies pages for more information)*

**3/ Self-censoring ‘hides’ the true extent of the issue**

A growing number of women’s health creators and businesses report that they alter or water down their language, images, and tone to avoid being penalised.

This may include:

**Using euphemisms** (e.g., “V-word” or “v\*gina” instead of “vagina” )

**Avoiding educational images** or diagrams, replacing them with imagery such as fruit.

**Skipping entirely crucial topics** like pleasure, libido, or postpartum healing

In our survey, 53% of respondents said they now self-censor to avoid censorship issues.

This phenomenon - self-censorship driven by fear of removal - also has the result of censoring women’s health information with similar impacts limiting public understanding and stunting the growth of businesses and health campaigns alike.

**4/ Issues are compounded by a lack of transparency from platforms and inadequate appeal processes.**

Typically our survey respondents refer to 'vague' terms and conditions and a 'lack of specific reasons' given for takedowns. They feel that moderation decisions rely on non-specific or overly-broad policies, such as violations of "adult content" or "sexual solicitation," with little or no specific guidance.

Appeal systems are described as inadequate, with users reporting repeated rejections and no meaningful human oversight.

44% have contacted social media platforms 1-5 times in last 12 months, 26% contacted them 6-10 times, 4% 11-15 times; and 13% have contacted them more than 15 times in the last 12 months

**Yet only 2% of respondents were satisfied with platform responses to moderation concerns.**

A further 13% of our survey respondents have never contacted the social media platforms — some citing a fear of further scrutiny of their accounts.

Without formal notice, proper channels for appeal, or clear standards tailored to health content, even well-regulated brands, educators, and charities are left in the dark — silenced without knowing why.

***“I’ve had to shift my content in the past six-ish months to be less about the sex education & freely expressing my sensuality, and more about coaching/ mindset. Which sucks because education and being a role model is really important for me.”***

— Creator and sexual wellness coach.

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***“I have actually stopped flagging [issues], as in my experience trying to fight it has led to further issues and more posts being flagged.”***

— Founder, sexual wellness brand.

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***“The biggest barrier with all of this is the lack of being able to speak to a real person, to explain what we do, and how we are compliant.”***

— Head of marketing,  
women’s health company.

# Case Studies: What digital censorship looks like



**In March 2025 CensHERship and The Case For Her supported six European women's health companies to file formal complaints with the European Commission under the Digital Services Act.**

## **What is The Digital Services Act (DSA)?<sup>4</sup>**

The Digital Services Act (DSA) is an EU regulation that sets rules for digital services, especially online platforms, to increase accountability and improve user safety. It's part of the Digital Services Act package, which includes two laws: the DSA and the Digital Markets Act (DMA). Though separate, they were proposed together by the European Commission to better regulate the digital space. The DSA is enforced by both the European Commission and national authorities in EU member states. The DSA was proposed in December 2020, entered into force in November 2022, and began applying to major platforms in August 2023 and to all others in February 2024.

## **What does the DSA apply to?**

The DSA applies to all online intermediaries and platforms in the EU, for example, online marketplaces, social networks, content sharing platforms, app stores, and online travel and accommodation platforms.

Very large online platforms and search engines (VLOPs and VLOSEs) have additional obligations. These VLOPs and VLOSEs include: Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, Amazon Store, YouTube, X, Bing and Google Search. Online platforms that don't comply with the DSA's rules could see fines of up to 6% of their global turnover.

**Our complaints to the DSA highlighted:**

**1/ Lack of objective application of existing terms and conditions**

Content is removed, restricted for reasons which appear to be inconsistent with the existing terms and conditions.

**2/ Lack of transparency and a lack of effective mechanisms to challenge decisions**

Women's health brands receive vague and inconsistent explanations for content takedowns, with little opportunity for appeal.

**3/ Biased policies**

Meta explicitly allows ads for male erectile dysfunction products, but does not include specific references for female libido.

**4/ Financial impact on startups**

Some businesses report losing significant revenue due to blocked ads and suspensions, making it harder to compete and secure investment.

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In the following pages we present case studies which show the breadth of the problem across a wide range of organisations. The first six are those we submitted to the DSA. We have also included experiences from charities and community educators.



# Amazon case study: Béa Fertility — an at-home fertility kit

*Had to replace "vagina" with "birth canal" to avoid Amazon bans*

Béa put maximum effort into becoming a Prime Rated seller on Amazon, building a bank of verified and real positive customer reviews and creating what's known as 'A+ content' for its storefront. This is when the Amazon review team looked at the submitted page and A+ content and rejected it.

Central to the issue was the use of the word 'vagina' and 'vaginal canal' within the A+ content sections of the page (the detailed descriptions you find further down a storefront). In contrast, the use of the word 'semen' was fine as a replacement for sperm.

Béa Fertility replaced the word 'vagina' with 'birth canal', which felt insensitive and crass - given it is a fertility product. However it was as close as Béa could come without risking being banned again.

Béa Fertility withdrew from Amazon at the end of January 2025.

This withdrawal from the Amazon channel meant Béa Fertility losing out on thousands of monthly impressions in a key channel where TTC (trying to conceive) consumers actively seek support, visibility and solutions like Béa's Treatment Kit.



# Meta and Google case study: Daye — a gynaecological health platform

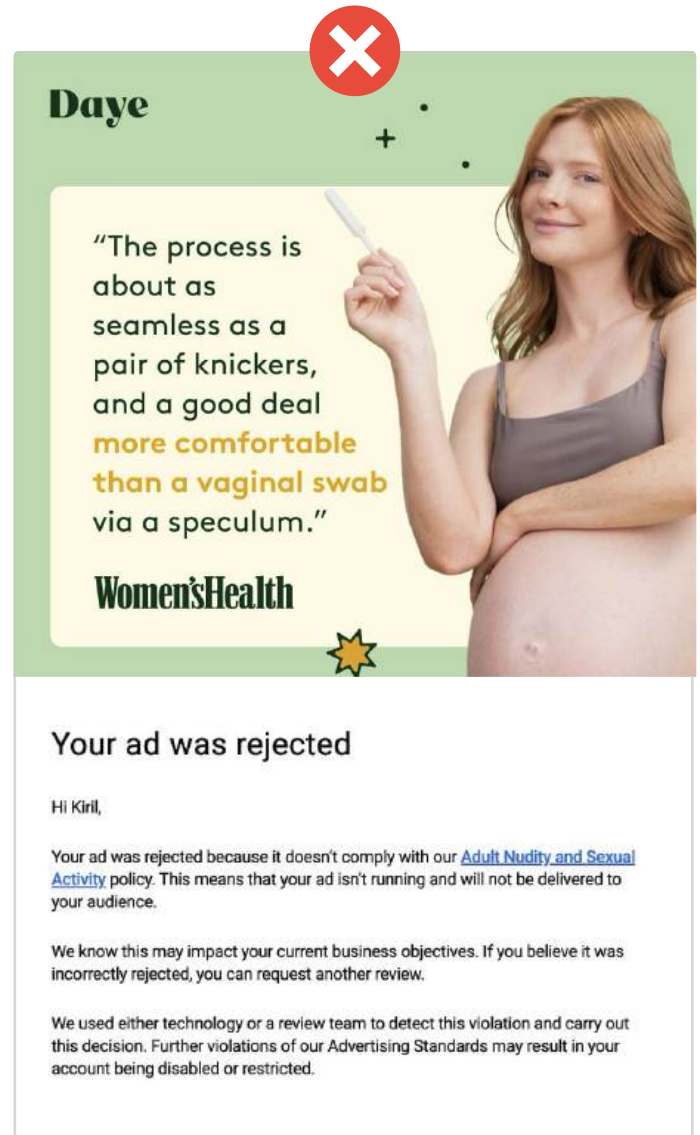
## *HPV screening ads falsely labeled as “adult content”*

**Meta Business Suite** is a platform that allows businesses to manage their Facebook and Instagram accounts in one place, including posting, messaging, advertising, and performance insights.

Daye, a company that offers diagnostic tampons for women’s health (including HPV screening), intended to use Meta to promote its product.

However, under the “Adult Nudity and Sexual Activity” policy<sup>5</sup>, an ad featuring a pregnant woman was incorrectly flagged and removed.

In addition, Daye has faced unfair restrictions under Google’s advertising policies. Despite not selling fertility or contraceptive products, Daye’s ads have been misclassified under Google’s “Birth control, fertility, and testing” policy, leading to reduced reach and higher costs. Google expanded this policy in late 2024 without clear justification and has refused to correct the misclassification, citing vague reasons like the presence of the word “fertility” on landing pages. Additionally, Daye’s ads are limited under Google’s Prescription Drug Services policy, despite proper certification and the fact that it does not sell medications directly. Search ad restrictions further block relevant consumer queries such as “home STI testing kit.”



# Meta case study: HANX — a sexual health and wellbeing platform

## *Health education and doctor-approved female libido supplement blocked, while Erectile Dysfunction ads thrive*

Meta's guidelines state that promotions for sexual and reproductive health or wellness are allowed as long as the focus is on health and not sexual pleasure or enhancement.<sup>6</sup>

Yet in practice, the application of this policy impacts women's health incorrectly and disproportionately. A carousel with advice from Dr Sarah Welsh, specialist in gynaecology and sexual health, on how to navigate a condom getting stuck in the vagina (a potentially serious health concern) was flagged. In this example, the notice wording was:

*"Your post may go against our guidelines on sexual content or nudity."*

In contrast, we see many examples where male-focused ads are specifically tied to sexual pleasure only.



Firstly, don't panic. Take a deep breath and try to remain calm. It's impossible for a condom to 'get lost' inside your vagina.

hanxofficial Yes, Dr @sarewelsh has removed more lost condoms from vaginas than you've had Pret sandwiches... 🍞 What goes in doesn't always come out as planned (trust us, it happens to the best of us 😬)... so we're taking on the



**We Are Mojo**  
Sponsored

Get better erections with Mojo. Permanently.

🏆 We've helped over 1,000,000 men overcome erection issues

🔥 Start instantly with sex therapy exercises, and clinically validated techniques

👤 No pills, procedures or awkward conversations


📖 Simple step-by-step guide for better erections



## Censorship Revealed

In addition, despite being common in peri- and post-menopause, low libido in women is not stated as a health condition in Meta's guidelines. Instead, a generic acceptance of 'products addressing the effects of menopause' or 'pain relief during sex' is detailed, while erectile dysfunction and premature ejaculation products are specifically detailed for men.<sup>7</sup>



As a result, HANX's doctor-approved libido supplement for women - available in major UK pharmacy retailers including Boots - has been repeatedly rejected or heavily penalized. Meanwhile ads using the words semen and sperm are approved:



**ExSeed Health**  
Sponsored

You've come this far—don't stop now. Test your sperm quality in minutes with ExSeed's clinically accurate, at-home kit.


**Test your sperm  
at home**



**hims**  
Sponsored

Don't be held back from spontaneous sex. Our discreet and personalised treatments are designed to give you the confidence to seize the moment whenever it arises. 🏹

- ✅ Medically approved & clinically proven
- 🏆 Trusted by over 500,000 customers
- 📦 FREE, discreet delivery...



**ALL NERVES  
no nudge?**

Hims personalised (12) tablets

hims



**hanxofficial**  
Sponsored

**HANX**

**Finally, a natural  
libido supplement.**

- ♥ perfect for menopause
- 👩 gynae-designed
- 🌿 natural ingredients

**20% OFF**  
with code  
NEW20



**SHOP NOW**

*This is the creative for the rejected Libido Lift ad*

# LinkedIn and Google case study: Aquafit Intimate — a vaginal health brand

*Menopause content flagged, while  
postpartum health posts were removed*

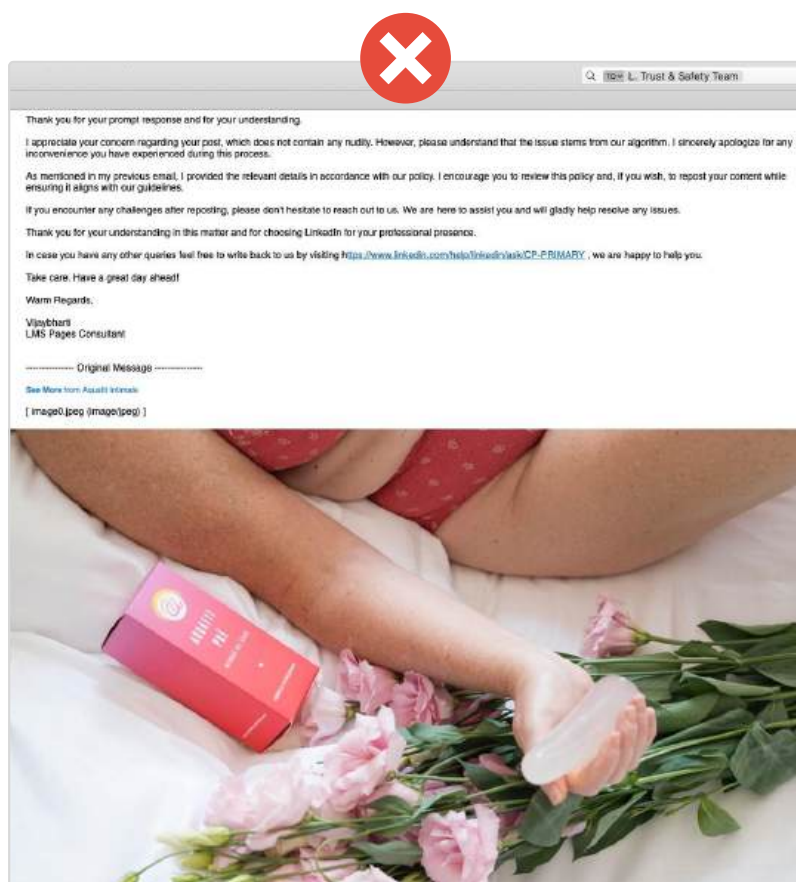
Aquafit Intimate faced repeated wrongful restrictions on LinkedIn, beginning in October 2024 when a World Menopause Day post was flagged and audience-restricted.

Despite LinkedIn apologizing for mistakenly identifying the content as nudity, a repost was again restricted. A message from LinkedIn stated that it required all members to engage in a 'professional manner and this type of content is not allowed.'

Multiple appeals were denied.

The account was finally reinstated, but posts on endometriosis, postpartum recovery, and vaginal dysbiosis were retroactively removed as "illegal products and services."

Aquafit Intimate faced a "moderate restriction" from Google Ads over references to common female health symptoms like vaginal dryness, despite not marketing to users under 18. The restriction severely impacted performance, leading to a 300% higher cost with zero conversions. Google cited concerns over bodily fluids and images of women's bodies, which Aquafit argued were mischaracterizations, noting their content contained no nudity and focused solely on vaginal dryness. The dispute remains unresolved.



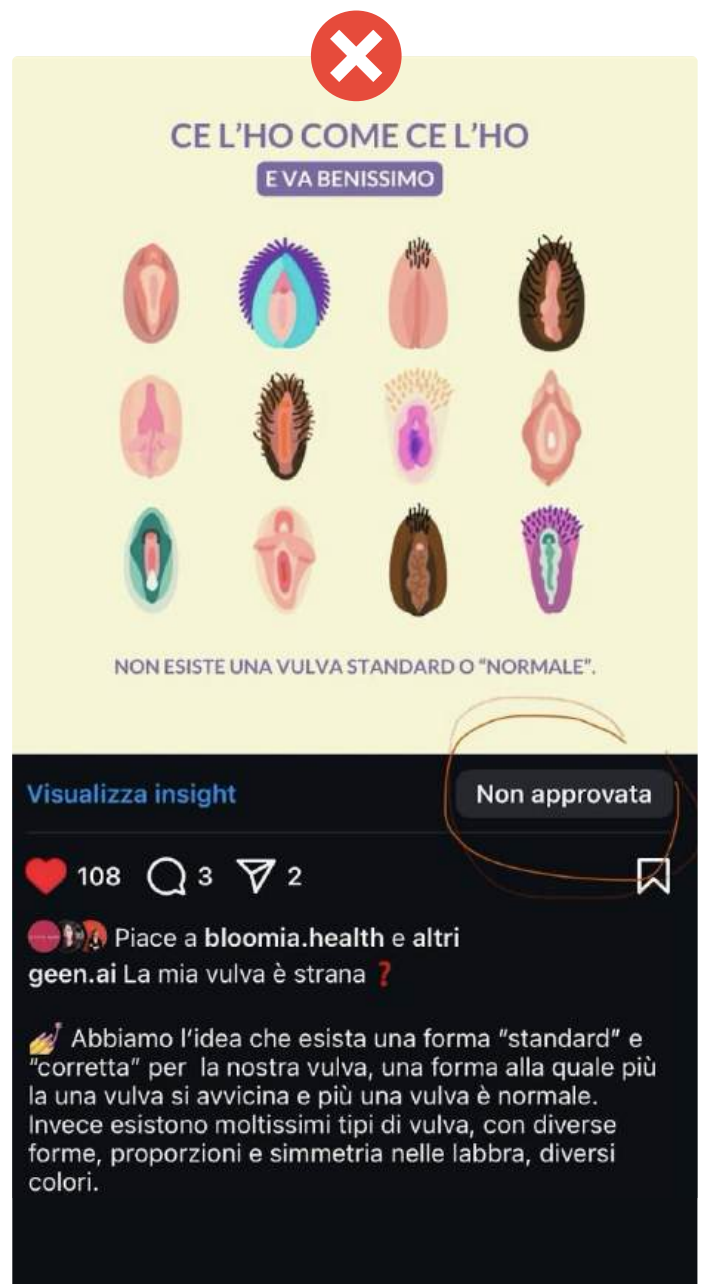
# Meta case study: Geen — a sexual health and wellbeing platform

## *Vulva diversity content removed; gender bias post flagged as political*

Geen attempted to share an ad which was categorised inaccurately as a perceived political ad.

It said: *'Can technology help us overcome gender biases and discrimination? Let's talk about it. Let's discuss why it's important for women and non-binary people to participate in technological and scientific progress to overcome the gender data gap, and specifically the FemTech gender health gap.'*

Separately, a boosted post promoting body positivity and awareness of diverse vulva shapes was blocked. The post aimed to challenge body shaming and promote acceptance.



# Meta case study: LactApp — a breastfeeding support app

## *Breastfeeding support ads rejected and posts censored for using everyday anatomical language.*

In December 2023, a post showcasing Lactapp's clothing merchandise was removed under the claim of violating the 'adult sexual services' policy. The reason for the removal was "You appear to have helped coordinate or encouraged sexual activities. Your content violates the adult sexual services policy of our community guidelines." After an appeal the post was reinstated, demonstrating the arbitrary and incorrect initial decision. The image to the right highlights how this content was not sexual in nature.

In 2024, LactApp's paid advertisements promoting its breastfeeding support app were rejected under "policy moderately restricted." The ad creative, which depicted a baby breastfeeding, was appropriate and intended to engage new parents needing support. Various versions of the ad were repeatedly rejected, indicating a pattern of biased enforcement.



# Multiple social media platforms case study: Bodyform

*Taboo-busting brand has faced years of repeated censorship on multiple platforms.*

## Vaginas Uncensored

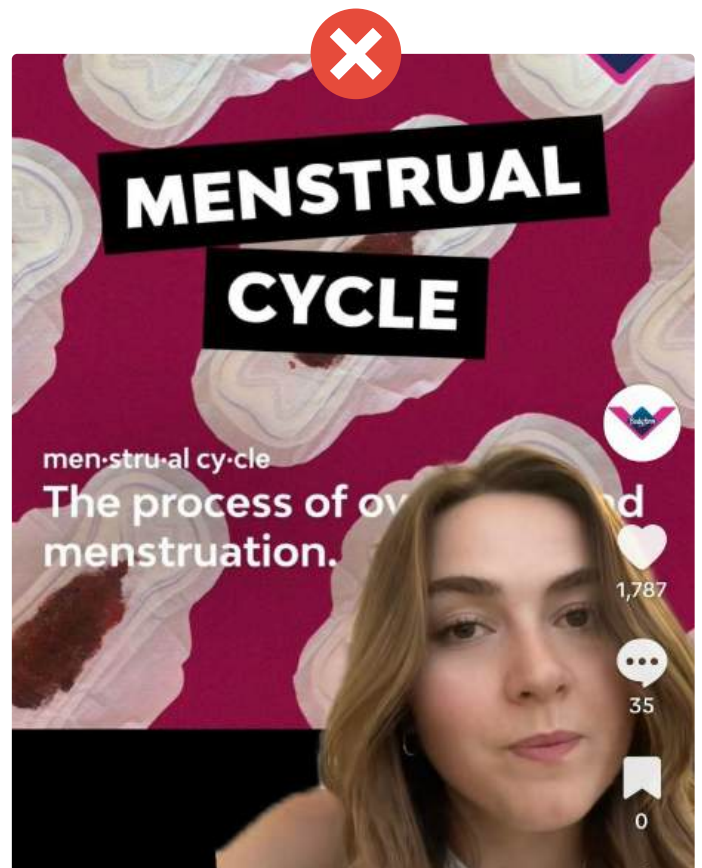
To mark 40 years of Bodyform in 2023, the brand launched Vaginas Uncensored, a campaign highlighting '40 words you can't say' — including terms like vagina, miscarriage and menopause — through real stories, artwork and personal experiences.

Despite the educational nature of the content, Bodyform faced repeated censorship on platforms like Twitter (X), Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. Posts were flagged as 'sexual' simply for using correct anatomical language. Over the month-long campaign, the brand was censored 16 times.

One ad featuring the words *menstrual cycle*, along with an image of a period pad and blood, was even rejected by Meta for allegedly requiring an 18+ warning — a decision at odds with the reality that millions of women+ under 18 menstruate.

## Never Just A Period

Bodyform's Never Just A Period campaign offered a relatable, real-life look at menstruation. Despite its educational intent, the launch post was initially disapproved on TikTok for 'implied genitalia exposure'. It took six weeks and multiple conversations with a TikTok representative to resolve the issue.



# Meta case study: Megan Rossiter — @Birth\_ed

## *Birth education confused with 'sexually explicit' content.*

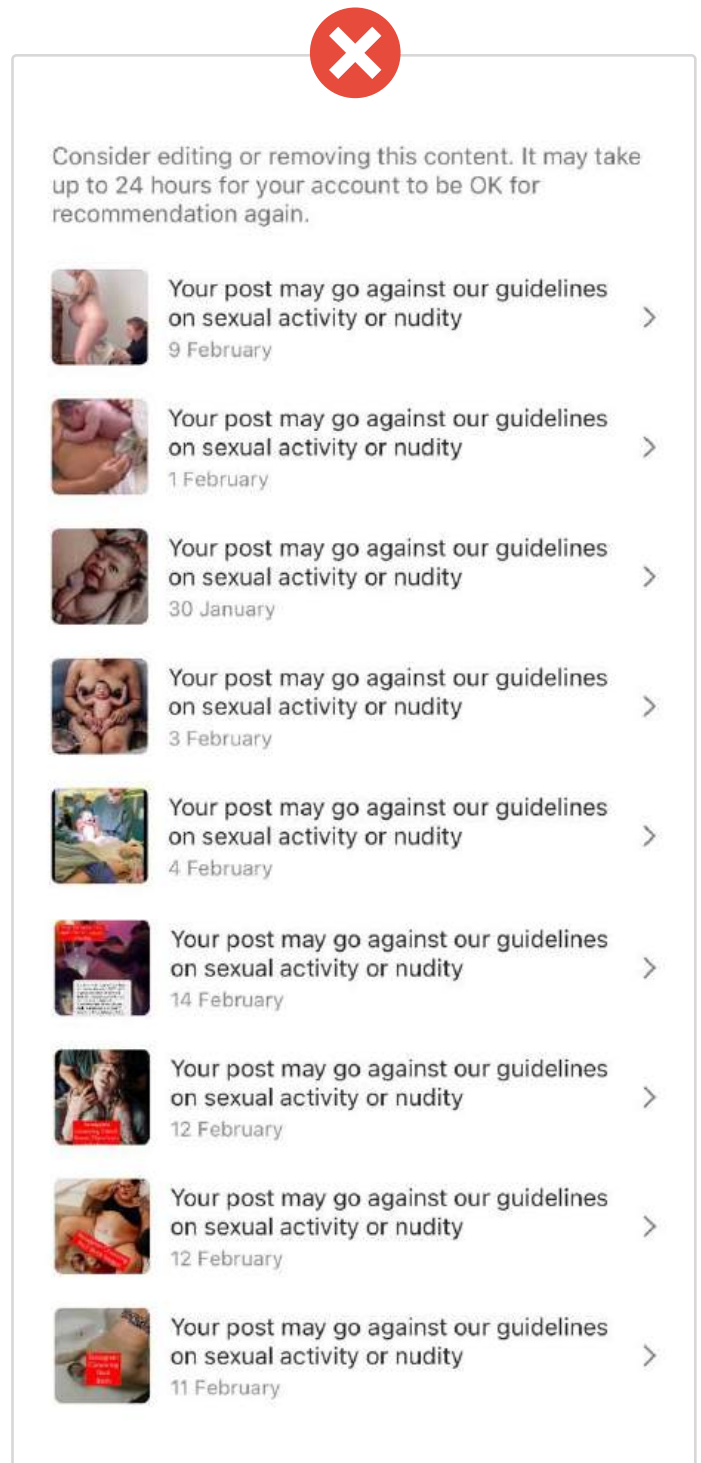
Megan, aka @Birth\_ed on Instagram has used social media as a way of providing free birth education for the last eight years. This previously used real imagery of birth and postpartum, as a way to empower and inspire women, as well as giving them a realistic picture of what they might expect from birth.

In 2020 Meta deleted Megan's Facebook account because they believed it to be 'sexually explicit'.

As Megan says:

*"In the years since then I've consistently had posts removed and my account restricted in several ways, with the threats of account removal being so frequent that I eventually stopped posting real birth images altogether."*

*"I rely on Instagram as my main marketing platform, and could lose my livelihood without it. So in the end, meta censorship became self censorship, and getting candid, honest information to women about birth has become ever harder!"*



A screenshot of an Instagram post showing a list of nine content warnings. At the top right of the screenshot is a red circle with a white 'X' icon. The warnings are as follows:

- Consider editing or removing this content. It may take up to 24 hours for your account to be OK for recommendation again.
- Your post may go against our guidelines on sexual activity or nudity (9 February)
- Your post may go against our guidelines on sexual activity or nudity (1 February)
- Your post may go against our guidelines on sexual activity or nudity (30 January)
- Your post may go against our guidelines on sexual activity or nudity (3 February)
- Your post may go against our guidelines on sexual activity or nudity (4 February)
- Your post may go against our guidelines on sexual activity or nudity (14 February)
- Your post may go against our guidelines on sexual activity or nudity (12 February)
- Your post may go against our guidelines on sexual activity or nudity (12 February)
- Your post may go against our guidelines on sexual activity or nudity (11 February)



birth\_ed

See any actions that Instagram has taken when your account or content doesn't follow our guidelines. [Learn more about Account Status.](#)

Removed content [>](#)

What can't be recommended [>](#)

## This content can't be recommended to non-followers

Consider editing or removing this post. Content that follows our Recommendations guidelines could get you more reach.

birth\_ed



## Your account can't be shown to non-followers

Your account activity may not follow our Recommendations guidelines.

### What this means

Your account and content won't appear in places such as **Explore**, **Search**, **Suggested users**, **Reels** and **Feed recommendations**.

[Learn about how recommendations work on Instagram.](#)

### What you can do

Edit or remove content [5 >](#)

Appeal decision  
In review. You'll get a notification once we've had another look.

Your post may go against our guidelines on sexual activity or nudity [>](#)  
23 January

Your post may go against our guidelines on sexual activity or nudity [>](#)  
24 January

Your post may go against our guidelines on sexual activity or nudity [>](#)  
25 January

Your post may go against our guidelines on sexual activity or nudity [>](#)  
20 January

Your post may go against our guidelines on sexual activity or nudity [>](#)  
20 January

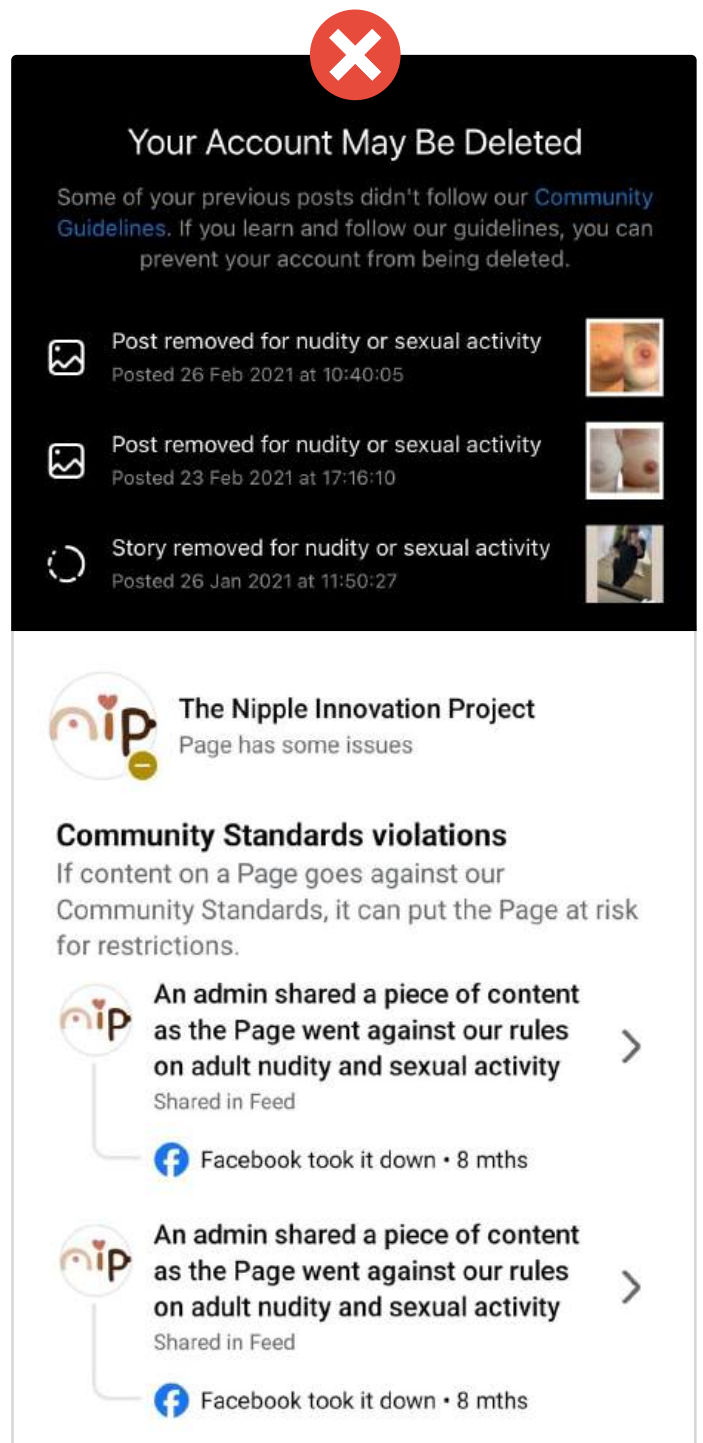
# Meta case study: NIP Charity — Lucy Thompson

## *Post-mastectomy nipple tattooist and owner of Areola Academy.*

The Nipple Innovation Project (NIP) is a charity which empowers breast cancer survivors through fully-funded, hyper-realistic, long lasting areola tattoos. Mastectomy (breast removal) can have both physical and mental health consequences for cancer survivors, and NIP's work helps to counter loss of identity, shame and grief.

Its founder Lucy Thompson has experienced issues on the charity's social media account, as well as her own accounts.

*"This is an issue for so many of us that work with the charity, it's a global issue. We appeal every rejection or restriction, which sometimes works, but sometimes they don't get back to my appeals at all, I just get ignored."*



The screenshot shows a Facebook notification with a red 'X' icon at the top. The notification text reads: "Your Account May Be Deleted". Below this, it states: "Some of your previous posts didn't follow our [Community Guidelines](#). If you learn and follow our guidelines, you can prevent your account from being deleted." There are three items listed:

- Post removed for nudity or sexual activity  
Posted 26 Feb 2021 at 10:40:05
- Post removed for nudity or sexual activity  
Posted 23 Feb 2021 at 17:16:10
- Story removed for nudity or sexual activity  
Posted 26 Jan 2021 at 11:50:27

Below the notification is a section for "The Nipple Innovation Project" with the subtitle "Page has some issues". Underneath is a heading "Community Standards violations" followed by the text: "If content on a Page goes against our Community Standards, it can put the Page at risk for restrictions." There are two violation entries:

- An admin shared a piece of content as the Page went against our rules on adult nudity and sexual activity  
Shared in Feed  
Facebook took it down • 8 mths
- An admin shared a piece of content as the Page went against our rules on adult nudity and sexual activity  
Shared in Feed  
Facebook took it down • 8 mths

# Why does digital suppression and censorship exist?

*“The problem is that the filters make mistakes, and they take down a lot of content that they shouldn't.”*

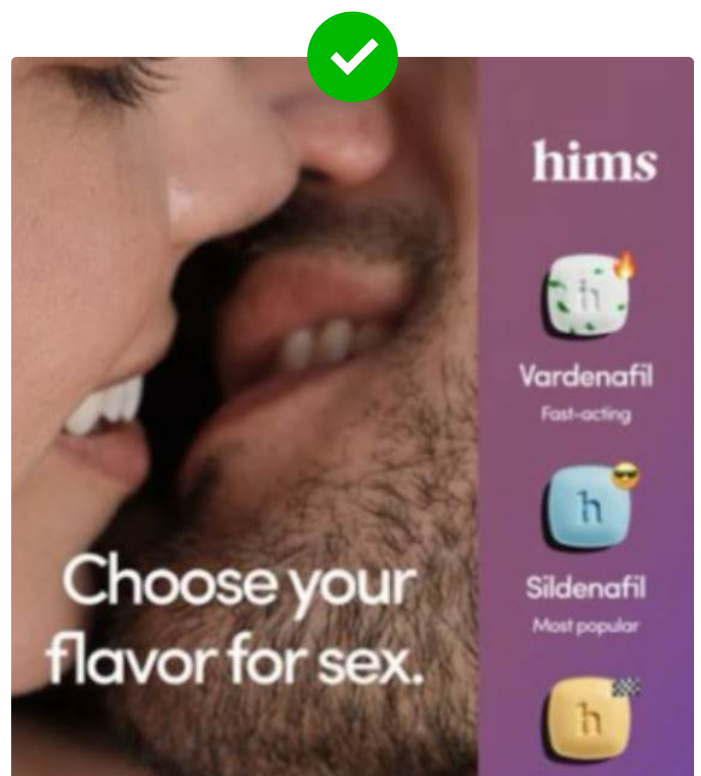
— Mark Zuckerberg, Meta, January 2025.<sup>8</sup>

In early 2025, Mark Zuckerberg admitted Meta's filters have wrongly removed legitimate content — a long-standing issue.<sup>9</sup>

The problem isn't limited to Meta. Across nearly every major platform — from Instagram to LinkedIn, TikTok to YouTube — blocked, downranked or mislabelled. Meanwhile violence, porn and misogynistic content continues to remain available.<sup>10</sup>

## So why does this keep happening?

These removals are not the result of a single person or policy decision. The reasons are layered - some technical, some cultural - and together they create an environment where women's health is routinely treated as inappropriate, despite being essential.



*“I saw an Instagram reel the other day where a man actually had his penis out, yet we can't show a pair of our knickers?”*

*There are some real double standards.”*

— Founder, period underwear brand.

**“Virtually all moderators’ pay varies based on their ability to meet performance targets, and these bonuses can be up to a quarter of their total salary.”**

— Niamh McIntyre, *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, May 2025.<sup>11</sup>

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## **The ‘mistake’ problem: misunderstanding and miscategorisations**

### **Mislabelled medical content**

Posts on topics such as postpartum recovery or pelvic pain are flagged as explicit due to misunderstood keywords or imagery.

### **Biased training data<sup>12</sup>**

Algorithms often equate female anatomy with adult content, even in clinical contexts.

### **Limited moderation capability**

Human reviewers may lack the time, training or understanding<sup>13</sup> to make informed calls on the nuance of women’s health content.

### **Fast-changing algorithms**

The VLOP algorithms change frequently<sup>14</sup> and abruptly without ‘warnings’ — and founders and often small teams struggle to keep track of constant changes.

## **Biased enforcement of platform rules**

### **Inconsistent application of rules**

Men’s health ads which specifically focus on sexual pleasure are routinely approved (even though this is not allowed under Meta community guidelines).<sup>15</sup> And a 2025 investigation by AI Forensics found over 3,000 pornographic ads approved through Meta’s advertising system in the past year alone.<sup>16</sup> Yet our research shows products for menopause support, vaginal moisturisers, or female libido products are routinely flagged or banned.

### **Lack of nuance in context evaluation**

Posts providing education on gynaecological cancer symptoms are flagged as inappropriate despite clear educational intent.

### **Visual bias**

Diagrams or graphics about female anatomy images get removed - as we have seen with Dr Aziza Sesay and Geen in our case studies, even if the caption provides medical context.

### Guidelines

#### Ads can't:

- Promote products or services that focus on sexual pleasure or enhancement, such as sex toys or sexual enhancement products
- Contain content that focuses on sexual pleasure or enhancement

#### Ads can:

- Promote sexual and reproductive health or wellness, as long as the focus is on health and not sexual pleasure or enhancement, and they target people aged 18 or older. This includes ads for:
  - Birth control products, including condoms
  - Family planning
  - Products addressing the effects of menopause
  - Erectile dysfunction products
  - Pain relief during sex
  - Prevention of premature ejaculation
  - Reproductive health products or services
- Promote sex education, as long as there's no sexualised or suggestive content and the focus is on health and not sexual pleasure or enhancement

*While Meta's guidelines<sup>17</sup> state that ads must not focus on sexual pleasure and only on health and wellness, our research finds that this is applied inconsistently.*

## Policy ambiguity

### Unclear guidelines

Community guidelines are often overly-broad<sup>18</sup>, with vague terms like “adult content,” “inappropriate nudity,” or “sexual solicitation.” This makes it difficult for creators to understand what's allowed — and gives platforms wide discretion to remove content.

### Conflation of sexual content with health education

Medically accurate terms such as menopause or vaginal health are deemed 'unsuitable' by VLOPs despite being clinically accepted with widespread use in the medical field.

## Deeper cultural and structural issues

### Cultural stigma and the oversexualisation of women's bodies

For centuries<sup>19</sup>, conversations about female anatomy have been silenced, shamed, or sexualised. This legacy persists in how society — and algorithms — react to words like *vagina*, *breasts*, and *menstruation*.

### Institutional bias

Male health topics are often treated clinically<sup>20</sup>, while women's health is viewed as sexual, niche, embarrassing, or taboo.

## Lack of representation in tech leadership and moderation

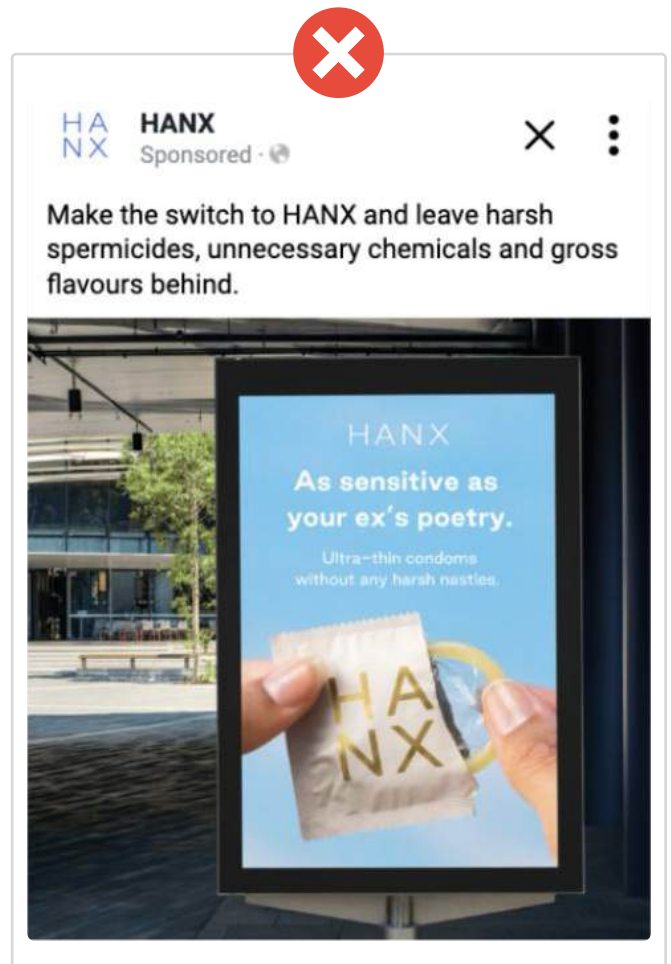
Decisions about content rules, enforcement, and escalation are often made by teams that lack diversity<sup>21</sup> — particularly in gender, lived experience, and healthcare understanding. Without inclusive voices in the room, harmful blind spots persist.

## A low priority

Despite years of advocacy from creators, charities, and businesses, as well as concerns documented in the [Center For Intimacy Justice’s report in 2022](#) and [again in 2025](#), [Bodyform’s ‘40 words campaign’ in 2023](#)<sup>22</sup> and [CensHERship’s own research in 2024/5](#), there has still been little change.

This combination of misinformed systems, vague rules, and cultural taboos creates an environment where women’s health content is not just vulnerable to censorship — it is actively suppressed.

In the next section we explain why this should matter to all of us.



***“The ugly fact is that these are many of the things Facebook has said are simply impossible when Congress and its own government have asked — on content, data sharing, privacy, censorship, and encryption — and yet its leadership are handing them all to China on a silver platter.”***

— Sarah Wynne-Williams,  
*Careless People*, 2025.<sup>23</sup>

# The impact: why digital censorship matters to us all

Censorship of women's health content isn't just a technical glitch or a frustrating inconvenience. It has real-world consequences for businesses, public health and society as a whole.

## 1/ Blocking growth for women's health businesses

Closing the women's health gap could unlock a \$1 trillion annual boost to the global economy, according to McKinsey and the World Economic Forum. And the 'FemTech' category (that is, products and services which innovate in women's health) will contribute to this, with a market worth an estimated \$60 billion by 2030<sup>24</sup>.



For founders working in women's health - from menstrual care to menopause, fertility to pelvic health - social media and online platforms are a vital tool. But when their posts are removed, ads rejected, or visibility throttled, they lose one of their most powerful lifelines.

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***“Our business has taken a £500,000 hit due to this in the last year.”***

— Founder, women's health brand.

***“Social media is a key channel - this is damaging our marketing efforts.”***

— Head of marketing, fertility clinic.

### **Revenue loss and time wasted**

One founder reported losing up to £500,000 in a single year due to ad blocks and reach limitations. Others describe spending hours appealing rejections, rewriting content, or walking on eggshells just to stay online.

### **Reputational damage**

When content is labelled “sexual” or “inappropriate,” it can erode trust in the brand and undermine years of work. Health companies trying to build credibility are instead being penalised for talking openly about the female body.

### **Unequal playing field**

While male-focused health brands - including those in erectile dysfunction and hair loss - often scale rapidly with few barriers, women’s health brands face constant uphill battles for visibility, funding, and legitimacy. Some founders report scaling back social content entirely — or self-censoring — just to survive.

At CensHERship, we have identified how social media censorship is part of a ‘lifecycle’ of challenges for women’s health businesses.

Femtech companies receive a fraction of available investment<sup>25</sup> - thanks to a largely male investor profile<sup>26</sup> and a bias in

decision-making.<sup>27</sup> Female-founded startups are reported to receive less than 2% of venture capital funding, and when compared to male-founded femtech companies, female-founded femtech firms receive on average half the investment sum.<sup>28</sup>

Femtech startup founders also have to build companies with limited health data and on the basis of a lack of medical research.<sup>29</sup> Then finally when they are ready to take their innovations to market they face challenges in marketing as described above.

***“When femtech companies face digital suppression and censorship by the big tech platforms, they struggle to reach customers, limiting their ability to advertise and generate revenue.***

***As an investor, I recognize how this not only restricts women’s access to essential health products and services but also permeates the already significant funding gap.”***

— Cristina Ljungberg, co-founder of *The Case For Her*.

**'If we want to get hold of people who are less than 35 years of age... we need to give them information in the way they want, whether that's on Instagram, TikTok, Facebook or Twitter [X];'**

— Dame Lesley Regan - Women's Health Ambassador, speaking at House of Commons, May 2024.<sup>30</sup>

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## **2/ Harm to public health**

When content about women's health is removed or hidden, the public doesn't just lose information — they lose access to timely, preventative care.

A recent study of 4,000 people undertaken by Essity in collaboration with CensHERship and the Period Equity Alliance, found that while three quarters of those aged 18-34 are turning to social media to educate themselves about male and female health, many struggle to find what they need.<sup>31</sup>

In addition, 85% of women<sup>32</sup> also feel they have been ignored by a medical professional at some point in their lives according to the UK Government's own Women's Health Strategy call for evidence in 2022. It is more important than ever that information is available via multiple sources.

### **Delayed diagnosis and poor awareness**

Educational content that could help people identify symptoms or seek sooner often disappears from view.

### **Barriers to treatment**

When creators can't talk openly about options for fertility, menopause, or chronic pain, it leaves people isolated, confused, and unsure where to turn.

### **Reinforcing stigma**

Continued censorship sends a message: that conversations about female bodies are inappropriate. It fuels shame, silence, and the persistent discomfort many people already feel discussing women's health.<sup>33</sup>

When women's health is silenced online, the impact ripples across society — affecting health outcomes, economic opportunity, and equality. More than a content issue; this is something that should matter to all of us.

# Recommendations

## Let's level the playing field for women's health content

**CensHERship** and **The Case for Her** are calling on platforms and policy-makers to collaborate on meaningful solutions that protect women's health content and ensure it can be shared freely on social media.

We propose the following specific recommendations:

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### For Platforms

#### 1/ Protect women's health content as default

**Medically accurate** women's health content should be defined as essential, not sexually explicit - with moderation practices and policies to match.

#### 2/ Enforce content policies fairly and objectively

**There must** be equal treatment of men's and women's health content with appropriate context taken into account.

**Develop clearer**, more detailed, contextual content guidelines in collaboration with content creators and businesses. These should reflect a broad, inclusive understanding of women's health and sexual health, ensuring policies are both practical and workable.

#### 3/ Improve appeals and transparency

**Platforms must** offer more specific reasons for removals and restrictions.

**There should** be an accessible, dedicated appeal process for health-related moderation - offering timely, transparent and fair resolutions.<sup>34</sup>

**Cooperate with** certified third-party oversight bodies like Appeals Centre Europe.<sup>35</sup>

**Establish real**, human, avenues for creators to contest content restrictions and engage in a continual feedback loop to improve moderation systems of men's and women's health content with appropriate context taken into account.

*Please note: on 5 June 2025 The Appeals Centre Europe, established by the DSA, introduced a recognised appeals path in the EU for any account suspended by Facebook, Instagram, TikTok or YouTube.*

## For Policymakers and Government

### 1/ Push for compliance, dialogue and action

**Actively call** for VLOPs to adopt and comply with fair advertising policies.

**Help bring** social media platforms and women's health stakeholders to the table to develop meaningful solutions to the ongoing censorship and suppression of women's health content.

### 2/ Protect digital expression in health education

**Ensure gender** bias is addressed under content moderation legislation (as seen in policies like the EU's Digital Services Act).

### 3/ Recognise the economic and health impact

**Acknowledge** the clear link between the censorship of women's health content, improvements in public health, and the growth of female-led businesses that drive economic progress.

## For Media & Corporates

### 1/ Highlight the business case

**Censorship** and digital suppression blocks innovation, hurts startups, and ultimately costs lives.

### 2/ Support the normalisation of women's health conversations

**Back initiatives** that promote open discussions around women's health.

**Commit to** the use of the correct female anatomical terms to reduce stigma.

### 3/ Hold VLOPs accountable

**Highlight continued** digital suppression and censorship.

## For Investors

### 1/ Challenge bias and drive change

**Actively challenge** gender bias in investment decisions.

**Actively seek** out and fund women-led health businesses.

**Create initiatives** to feed the pipeline for more women to reach partner-level decision-making positions.

# Conclusion

**The women's health ecosystem is resilient, creative, and determined in the face of digital suppression and online censorship.**

From founders to healthcare professionals, charity leaders to educators, and creators to campaigners - we are the people working to share knowledge, challenge stigma, and improve lives.

Yet, as we have outlined in this report, across social media and large online platforms, our voices are being restricted.

Content about women's health — from menstruation and menopause to fertility, postpartum recovery, and sexual well-being — is routinely flagged, removed, or hidden. Medically accurate, non-sexual posts are labelled “adult content.” Ads for health innovations are rejected. Visibility is throttled.

**And when we ask why, we are left without answers.**

This is not a minor inconvenience. It is a systemic failure that is stalling innovation, blocking access to essential care, and — we fear — costing lives.



Closing the women's health gap could unlock a \$1 trillion annual boost to the global economy.<sup>36</sup> Yet the people building that future — especially female-led businesses and charities — are being stifled by platforms and policies that still treat healthcare as an obscenity.

As this report makes clear, the causes of censorship and digital suppression are complex — but the way forward is not. The tools, the evidence, and the urgency are all in front of us. What's needed now is action.

# This is your call to level the playing field for women's health.




We will not replace *vagina* with “V-word” or refer to *menopause* as “the change.” We will not avoid topics like *libido, discharge, prolapse, or periods* — because we must talk about real bodies, real experiences, and real health concerns.

We will not stop our work to advance healthcare for more than half the world's population.

## Support our work:

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Head to [censhershship.co.uk](https://censhershship.co.uk) to:

-  **Share** your experiences of censorship and digital suppression contact us for partnerships or collaboration.
-  **Join** our mailing list to stay updated on our progress.
-  **Sign our** [open letter calling for action](#).

# Footnotes

- 1 Banned hashtags have led to a number of websites being created claiming to help users to check which hashtags are banned. Example: <https://metahashtags.com/banned-hashtags/>
- 2 <https://www.futurefemhealth.com/p/share-your-view-on-the-censorship>
- 3 CensHERship 2024/2025 survey report <https://www.censherhip.co.uk/s/UPDATED-May-2025-Survey-results-censHERship-social-media.pdf>
- 4 The Digital Services Act official EU website: [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/digital-services-act\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/digital-services-act_en)
- 5 Meta community guidelines: <https://transparency.meta.com/en-gb/policies/community-standards/adult-nudity-sexual-activity/>
- 6 <https://transparency.meta.com/en-gb/policies/ad-standards/content-specific-restrictions/adult-products-or-services/> accessed 1 June 2025.
- 7 <https://transparency.meta.com/en-gb/policies/ad-standards/restricted-goods-services/health-wellness/>
- 8 Transcript of Mark Zuckerberg's statement, January 2025: <https://www.techpolicy.press/transcript-mark-zuckerberg-announces-major-changes-to-metas-content-moderation-policies-and-operations/>
- 9 CensHERship 2024/2025 survey report <https://www.censherhip.co.uk/s/UPDATED-May-2025-Survey-results-censHERship-social-media.pdf>  
Center for Intimacy Justice report 2025 <https://www.intimacyjustice.org/report2025>
- 10 Social media algorithms 'amplifying misogynistic content': <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2024/feb/social-media-algorithms-amplify-misogynistic-content-teens> ; How social media algorithms show violence to boys: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4gdqzypdzo>
- 11 <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2025-05-09/my-two-years-reporting-on-big-techs-hidden-scandal>
- 12 Bias in Machine Learning, Per Axbom <https://axbom.com/bias-in-machine-learning/>
- 13 My Two Years Reporting on Big Tech's Biggest Scandal, Niamh McIntyre <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2025-05-09/my-two-years-reporting-on-big-techs-hidden-scandal>
- 14 <https://blog.hootsuite.com/facebook-algorithm/>
- 15 <https://transparency.meta.com/en-gb/policies/ad-standards/content-specific-restrictions/adult-products-or-services/> accessed 1 June 2025
- 16 Pay-to-play: Meta's community (double) standards on pornographic ads, January 2025: <https://aiforensics.org/work/meta-porn-ads>
- 17 <https://transparency.meta.com/en-gb/policies/ad-standards/content-specific-restrictions/adult-products-or-services/>
- 18 <https://transparency.meta.com/en-gb/policies/community-standards/adult-nudity-sexual-activity>

## Censorship Revealed

- 19 <https://blog.hootsuite.com/facebook-algorithm/>
- 20 It was only in 1993 that women's inclusion in clinical medical trials was mandated <https://orwh.od.nih.gov/toolkit/recruitment/history>
- 21 Careless People: A Cautionary Tale of Power, Greed, and Lost Idealism, Sarah Wynn Williams (Pan Macmillan, 2025)
- 22 <https://uk.news.yahoo.com/sigh-social-media-platforms-censoring-153107852.html>
- 23 Careless People: A Cautionary Tale of Power, Greed, and Lost Idealism, Sarah Wynn Williams (Pan Macmillan, 2025), p. 313.
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- 25 <https://pitchbook.com/news/articles/female-founders-vc-year-in-review-2023> for USA information  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/women-led-high-growth-enterprise-taskforce-report/women-led-high-growth-enterprise-taskforce-report-html> for UK information
- 26 SIE Ventures, European Femtech Market Mapping Report 2024 <https://www.sie.ventures/femtech-report>
- 27 Gender bias and discrimination towards women entrepreneurs by venture capitalists – a randomized response survey <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13691066.2025.2493049#abstract>
- 28 SIE Ventures, European Femtech Market Mapping Report 2024 <https://www.sie.ventures/femtech-report>
- 29 Five times more research papers exist into erectile dysfunction which affects 19% of men, than papers for pre-menstrual syndrome which affects over 90% of women <https://www.researchgate.net/blog/why-do-we-still-not-know-what-causes-pms>
- 30 <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-13395573/Government-needs-use-TikTok-Instagram-health-advice-young-people-dont-read-NHS-leaflets-says-Womens-Health-Ambassador.html>
- 31 <https://www.essity.com/company/essity-in-the-world/uk-roi/news/shadow-banning/>
- 32 <https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/womens-health-strategy-call-for-evidence/outcome/3fa4a313-f7a5-429a-b68d-0eb0be15e696>
- 33 'Medical misogyny' is leaving women in unnecessary pain and undiagnosed for years <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5901/cmselect/cmwomeq/337/report.html>
- 34 <https://www.appealscentre.eu/appeals-centre-europe-starts-reviewing-account-suspensions/>
- 35 Appeals Centre Europe: <https://www.appealscentre.eu/>
- 36 Closing the Women's Health Gap: A \$1 Trillion Opportunity to Improve Lives and Economies (2024) <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/mckinsey%20health%20institute/our%20insights/closing%20the%20womens%20health%20gap%20a%201%20trillion%20dollar%20opportunity%20to%20improve%20lives%20and%20economies/closing-the-womens-health-gap-report.pdf>

# Appendix

## Methodology

To understand the scale, nature, and impact of social media censorship on women's health content, CensHERship conducted a mixed-methods research project between February 2024 and May 2025. This research combined quantitative data from surveys with qualitative insights from open-ended responses and case study interviews.

## Survey design and distribution

An open call survey was launched on 1 February 2024 and distributed via CensHERship's digital channels, industry networks, and partner organisations, including The Case For Her. The survey was designed to capture experiences of social media censorship among a wide range of stakeholders in women's health—such as founders, creators, healthcare professionals, nonprofit leaders, and advocates.

### Key areas of focus included:

**Incidents** of content takedowns, rejections, or account restrictions

**Platform-specific** experiences

**The impact** on visibility, revenue, and mental health

**Patterns** of self-censorship and content modification

**Attempts** to appeal and platform responses

The survey remains open, with data cited in this report accurate as of 15 May 2025. To date, 115 unique responses have been received.

## Qualitative case studies

In March 2025, CensHERship and The Case for Her partnered with six women's health brands—Bea Fertility, Aquafit Intimate, Geen, HANX, LactApp, and Daye—to prepare formal complaints under the EU Digital Services Act. These brands provided in-depth documentation of their experiences, including platform correspondence, screenshots of content flagged or removed, and the resulting impact on their businesses.

## Limitations

As an open, self-reported survey, the data may reflect selection bias toward those who have experienced issues or are more digitally active. However, the high frequency and consistency of reported incidents across different platforms and geographies suggest these findings represent a widespread and systemic issue.

# Acknowledgments

CensHERship and The Case for Her wish to thank everyone who shared their experiences and perspectives in the course of this work.

We're especially grateful to those who contributed to our case studies for their time, insight, and openness. Your input has been essential in helping us understand and highlight the real-world impact of this issue.

# Censorship Revealed

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