



Meta responses to Questions on Notice - Inquiry on Foreign Interference through Social Media - Tuesday 11 July 2023

Questions from Transcript

Question 1:

In particular I want to revisit something in your submission you have referred to today which is the issue of over 200 operations of coordinated inauthentic behaviour from 68 countries. In your submission is it mostly targeted audiences in their home countries but around a third of them were aimed at audiences abroad. So that is what fits in the classic definition of foreign interference operation, targeting another country. Thank you for disclosing that to the committee in your submission. I wonder if you can break down that - those numbers any further. The one-third that targeted audiences abroad. Some of those would have included scams and financially motivated, or were they politically motivated?

Meta response:

Typically, when we report CIB, we're sharing our threat research into covert influence operations that seek to mislead people to manipulate or corrupt public debate for a strategic goal. These can be commercial PR or marketing firms working on behalf of their clients inside or outside their country, or other groups. While at times, these deceptive strategic campaigns may use spam-like tactics to make their content appear more popular than it is, we normally see them invest in complex efforts attempting to deceive the public about who is behind the operation and what they are doing much more so than a typical dedicated scam or spam activity. We typically report financially-motivated scam and spam activities in our quarterly community standards enforcement report as part of the following sections because we tackle this type of abuse at scale, using primarily automated systems which we constantly fine-tune.

- Spam content removals:
<https://transparency.fb.com/data/community-standards-enforcement/spam/facebook/>
- Fake accounts (typically relied on by scammers and spammers):
<https://transparency.fb.com/data/community-standards-enforcement/fake-accounts/facebook/>

Question 2:

In your submission you say there were four instances of coordinated inauthentic behaviour that targeted Australians. Can you tell me if any of those I have any of those were politically motivated?

On the last one [the TruthMedia takedown in 2020], what was the assessed motivation of the actor in that instance?

Meta response:

As we've always said, it's very challenging in CIB cases to assess the exact motivation behind these operations, which is why we continue to publish our threat research with insights we are confident in so that the public, researchers and policymakers can assess for themselves.

We do not have any further information to share about this particular CIB takedown other than what is available in the CIB report released in July 2020. This is available at: <https://about.fb.com/news/2020/08/july-2020-cib-report/>

Question 3:

Have there been any further networks you owe identified and taken out in this calendar year [beyond the last quarterly Adversarial Threat Report]?

I appreciate the second quarter has only just passed. If there's findings in that quarterly report which are relevant, I would appreciate if you could provide it as soon as possible, to factor it in.

Meta response:

The next Adversarial Threat Report, which we expect to publish sometime in mid-to-late August, will include CIB takedowns on our services that have occurred since Q2 2023.

Question 4:

What will Meta's approach be on the Threads app [to state media labels and third-party fact-checking] and what will differ in any way to your other platforms?

Can you give me a sense of timing? I'm not necessarily saying that they should be removed, I think sometimes it is useful to understand their perspective, but I wouldn't want users to be misled these are genuinely free and independent journalistic outlets. They are not, they are propaganda outfits and should be labelled as such. You say it's your aspiration. You have tens of millions of users signing up, when will you be able to have policies like that in place?

Meta response:

In the short two weeks since Threads was released, the team has been focussed on maintaining continuity of the service and fixing bugs. Instagram's Community Guidelines have applied to Threads since launch, as have some key safety and integrity tools; we will be building out additional integrity features as soon as we can.

Question 5:

Thank you. Finally, from me, you mentioned the broader geopolitical environment that we're in. We had some evidence in the first hearings around the importance of investing in digital literacy, not just in our own country, but also, for example, in the Asia-Pacific. So, you talked about take-downs and you your monitoring and removal but there is of course a need to build resilience, particularly in those countries where some of the technology is newer and where there could be risks of misinformation and disinformation campaigns. a particular focus in our region that you can talk to us about?

Meta response:

In 2020, Meta formed a Pacific Islands Digital Citizenship and Online Safety Advisory Group with our safety partners in the region - Save the Children Australia and Save the Children Fiji. The group meets 2-3 times each year and its current membership comprises Meta, Save the Children, as well as government representatives from seven Pacific Island countries: Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. The group provides a forum to discuss digital literacy and online safety opportunities and challenges across the region, and works together to shape Meta's online safety initiatives in the Pacific.

Since the beginning of 2021, Meta has partnered with Save the Children Australia and Save the Children Fiji to deliver 'I Am Digital' - a digital literacy education initiative across the same seven Pacific Island countries. This program draws on Meta's Asia-Pacific 'We Think Digital' digital literacy initiative.¹

The educational resources have been developed in consultation with young people in the Pacific Islands and target teenagers, youth and parents, and educators, and have so far been delivered in English and nine locally spoken languages (Bislama, Fiji Hindi, Fijian iTaukei, French, Kiribati language, Samoan, Solomon Islands Pijin, Tok Pisin and Tongan). The curriculum covers topics including account safety and security, respectful online communication, identifying and avoiding online bullying and harassment, and media literacy.

I Am Digital has been delivered as a social media campaign and on radio, and in the latest phase this year, has piloted educational visits in high schools across Fiji, PNG, Solomon Islands and Tonga. The latest social media awareness campaign (which concluded in February 2023) reached more than 2 million people across the Pacific Islands.²

Question 6:

Does Meta ever receive requests related to content moderation from the Russian government, the Chinese government or the Iranian government and if so, how are the requests dealt with by Meta?

Meta response:

When we receive requests to review content, we firstly review the content according to our own Community Standards. The same rules are applied regardless of who reports the content to us.

When something on Facebook or Instagram is reported to us as going against local law, but doesn't go against our Community Standards, we may restrict the content's availability in the country where it is alleged to be unlawful.

While uncommon, we will occasionally receive legal notices that assert extraterritorial jurisdiction, and request that we restrict the availability of content globally. This report details those instances of global restrictions.

¹ See details here: <https://wethinkdigital.fb.com/>

² More information, including the full I Am Digital curriculum is available here: <https://wethinkdigital.fb.com/pc/en-us/iamdigital/>

While we respect the law in countries where we operate, we strongly oppose any extraterritorial legal demands and actively pursue all available options to appeal such orders.

We also make information transparently available relating to requests that we receive from all governments around the world for content restrictions or requests for user data.

All data on content restrictions is available at:

<https://transparency.fb.com/data/content-restrictions/>

All data on user requests is available at:

<https://transparency.fb.com/data/government-data-requests/>

Meta recognises the potential for content moderation to impact human rights and has taken steps to demonstrate our commitment to human rights principles. We joined the Global Network Initiative, and made commitments in our Corporate Human Rights Policy to respect human rights as set out in the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGP) and other international human rights standards.

Question 7:

What about government agency Meta accounts? Would they be dealt with in the same way as elected officials or elected parliamentarians [for the purposes of misinformation]?

They would be eligible for fact checking, but I am happy to take it on notice, I don't think I sent a single example of a government agency being fact checked in five years at Meta.

Meta response:

Yes, we treat government departments the same as politicians for the purposes of fact-checking.

Question 8:

Very happy to follow up with some information for the committee about where to access these system cards that were released about a month ago?

Well, Senator, I think providing the code that we have is, as I was saying, not necessarily the most meaningful approach, and it is proprietary, so I'm not confident we can provide access to that code, but happy to provide what else we can to assist on notice.

Meta response:

Our Global President Sir Nick Clegg wrote in March 2021 about the relationship between users and the algorithms Meta uses to shape what you see on Facebook and Instagram, and to challenge the myth that algorithms leave people powerless over the content they see.³ In that piece, he wrote that we needed to be more frank about how this relationship works and to give users more control over what they see.

In June 2023, we published a follow-up blog post.⁴ We are building on Nick's commitment by being more transparent around several of the AI systems that incorporate your feedback to rank content across Facebook and Instagram. These systems make it more likely that the posts users see are relevant and interesting to them. We're also making it clearer how users can better control what they see on our apps, as well as testing new controls and making others more accessible. And we're giving more detailed information for experts so they can better understand and analyse our systems.

We released 22 system cards for Facebook and Instagram. They give plain-language information about how our AI systems rank content, some of the predictions each system makes to determine what content might be most relevant to users, as well as the controls users can use to help customise their experience. They cover Feed, Stories, Reels and other surfaces where people go to find content from the accounts or people they follow. The system cards also cover AI systems that recommend "unconnected" content from people, groups, or accounts they don't follow. All systems cards are available at <https://transparency.fb.com/features/explaining-ranking>

In the next few weeks, we will start rolling out a new suite of tools for researchers: Meta Content Library and API. The Library includes data from public posts, pages, groups, and events on Facebook. For Instagram, it will include public posts and data from creator and business accounts. Data from the Library can be searched, explored, and filtered on a graphical user interface or through a programmatic API. Researchers from qualified academic and research institutions pursuing scientific or public interest research topics will be able to apply for access to these tools through partners with deep expertise in secure data sharing for research. These tools will provide the most comprehensive access to publicly-available content across Facebook and Instagram of any research tool we have built to date.

³ <https://nickclegg.medium.com/you-and-the-algorithm-it-takes-two-to-tango-7722b19aa1c2>

⁴ <https://about.fb.com/news/2023/06/how-ai-ranks-content-on-facebook-and-instagram/>

Question 9:

Senator Walsh has a follow-up, and then we will have to call time.

Thank you, I wanted to clarify my question and your answer about how you work with researchers in relation to your algorithms. So you mentioned the system cards, but my question was really, are there circumstances in which you do provide your actual algorithms, or the code of them, to researchers at some level for those transparency purposes?

Meta response:

We provide transparency about how content is ranked and recommended on our services in a number of ways.

Firstly, the systems cards referred to in the previous answer provide information about the signals that are used to rank and recommend content.

Secondly, the Content Distribution Guidelines provide details on what content receives reduced distribution on Feed because it's problematic or low quality.⁵ Similarly, to help people better understand the kinds of content we recommend, and provide context on why some types of content aren't included in recommendations, and therefore may not be distributed as widely, we provide transparency via the Recommendation Guidelines.⁶

Thirdly, we provide on platform, real-time transparency to users about why they are seeing a particular post or ad.⁷

Finally, as indicated in our response to Question 8, researchers will in coming weeks start to have access to the Meta Content Library and API.

⁵ Please see the Content Distribution Guidelines here:

<https://transparency.fb.com/en-gb/features/approach-to-ranking/types-of-content-we-demote/>

⁶ Please see the Recommendations Guidelines in the [Facebook Help Center](#) and [Instagram Help Center](#)

⁷ Please see the original announcement about "Why Am I Seeing This?" for organic posts in 2019 here: <https://about.fb.com/news/2019/03/why-am-i-seeing-this/> and details of the updates in 2021 here: <https://about.fb.com/news/2021/03/more-control-and-context-in-news-feed/> For the details of the "Why Am I Seeing This Ad?" tool, please see the latest update here: <https://about.fb.com/news/2023/02/increasing-our-ads-transparency/>