

Damian Collins MP
Chair, Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

12th November 2018

Dear Mr. Collins and fellow Committee Chairs,

Thank you for the invitation to appear before your Grand Committee. As we explained in our letter of November 2nd, Mr Zuckerberg is not able to be in London on November 27th for your hearing and sends his apologies.

We remain happy to cooperate with your inquiry as you look at issues related to false news and elections. On that basis we thought it would be useful to set out some of the things we have been doing at Facebook over the last year. You may have heard us refer to some of this work already during the many hearings and communications we've had with committees and Governments around the world.

False News

We have an extensive team working to reduce the distribution of false news. We describe those measures in an update we published in June of this year, available at <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/06/increasing-our-efforts-to-fight-false-news/>

On September 26th, we signed an [EU Code of Practice on Disinformation](#), underscoring our commitment to reducing fake news on our platform by taking action in five areas:

- Disrupting advertising revenues of certain accounts and websites that spread disinformation;
- Making political advertising and issue based advertising more transparent;
- Addressing the issue of fake accounts and online bots;
- Empowering consumers to report disinformation and access different news sources, while improving the visibility and findability of authoritative content;
- Empowering the research community to monitor online disinformation through privacy-compliant access to the platforms' data.

You may also be interested in the recent research reports that all point to a significant reduction in the amount of false news circulating on Facebook. Our summary of the findings of those reports and links to them can be found at <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/10/inside-feed-michigan-lemonde/>.

To summarise:

- Alcott, Gentzkow and Yu published a study on misinformation on Facebook and Twitter (<http://web.stanford.edu/~gentzkow/research/fake-news->

[trends.pdf](#)). The researchers compiled a list of 570 sites that had been identified as false news sources in previous studies and online lists. They then measured the volume of Facebook engagements (shares, comments and reactions) and Twitter shares for all stories from these 570 sites published between January 2015 and July 2018. The researchers found that on Facebook, interactions with these false news sites declined by more than half since the 2016 election.

- A University of Michigan study on misinformation (<https://csmr.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/UMSI-CSMR-Iffy-Quotient-Whitepaper-810084.pdf>) had similar findings. The Michigan team compiled a list of sites that commonly share misinformation by looking at judgements made by Media Bias/Fact Check and Open Sources. They have coined a metric called the “Iffy Quotient” to measure how much content from those sites has been distributed on Facebook and Twitter. The Iffy Quotient for Facebook spiked in 2016 but improved beginning in mid-2017. When an “engagement-weighted” version of the Iffy Quotient is considered — that is, when social media interactions like likes, comments, and shares are factored in — the study finds that Facebook now has 50% less “Iffy Quotient content” than Twitter and has returned to its early 2016 levels.
- Les Décodeurs, the fact-checking arm of the French newspaper Le Monde, also released research (https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2018/10/17/les-fausses-informations-perdent-du-terrain-sur-facebook_5370461_4355770.html) that analyzed social media engagement from Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Reddit on 630 French websites, which they categorized into “unreliable or dubious sites”, “less reliable sites,” and “recommendable sites.” Les Décodeurs found that Facebook engagement with “unreliable or dubious sites” has halved in France since 2015. Les Décodeurs found that the Facebook engagement with the “less reliable” sites on its list followed similar curves from 2015 to the beginning of 2017, and is now at a level significantly lower than it was in 2015, while “more recommendable” sites have maintained their audience.

We recognise that the battle is not won and there is still more we need to do but have been pleased to see this independent confirmation that our work is having a beneficial effect.

Co-ordinated Inauthentic Behaviour

This is the way we describe the kind of activity that was carried out by the Internet Research Agency. It involves people creating fake online personas that they use to advance a particular agenda in a way that is deceptive to others.

Our security team is very active in looking for this kind of behaviour and removing the perpetrators from our service. Much of this security work is necessarily

confidential, but we have shared information publicly on a number of networks that we have identified and disrupted over the last few months. To summarise:

On August 21st we announced that we had removed 652 Pages, groups and accounts for coordinated inauthentic behavior that originated in Iran and targeted people across multiple internet services in the Middle East, Latin America, UK and US. This announcement included examples of the content we found, the details on the process we followed to uncover it, and the steps we took in response. Separately, at the same time we removed Pages, groups and accounts that can be linked to sources the US government has previously identified as Russian military intelligence services. (<https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/08/more-coordinated-inauthentic-behavior/>)

On October 11th we announced that we had removed 559 Pages and 251 accounts that had broken our rules against spam and coordinated inauthentic behavior. Many were using fake accounts or multiple accounts with the same names and posted large amounts of content across a network of Groups and Pages to drive traffic to their websites. Many used the same techniques to make their content appear more popular on Facebook than it really was. Others were ad farms using Facebook to mislead people into thinking that they were forums for legitimate political debate. (<https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/10/removing-inauthentic-activity/>)

On October 22nd we shared details around the removal of 68 Pages and 43 accounts associated with a Brazilian marketing group, Raposo Fernandes Associados (RFA), for violating our misrepresentation and spam policies. The people behind RFA created Pages using fake accounts or multiple accounts with the same names, which violates our Community Standards. (<https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/10/inauthentic-activity-brazil/>)

On October 26th we removed 82 Pages, Groups and accounts for coordinated inauthentic behavior that originated in Iran and targeted people in the US and UK. The Page administrators and account owners typically represented themselves as US citizens, or in a few cases UK citizens, and posted about politically charged topics such as immigration. Despite attempts to hide their true identities, a manual review of these accounts linked their activity to Iran. We also identified some overlap with the Iranian accounts and Pages we removed in August. Again, we shared examples of the content we found and the steps we had taken in response. (<https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/10/coordinated-inauthentic-behavior-takedown/>)

On November 5th we announced that we had removed 30 Facebook accounts and 85 Instagram accounts that may have been engaged in coordinated inauthentic behavior in the US, after being contacted by US law enforcement. Almost all the Facebook Pages associated with these accounts appear to be in the French or Russian languages, while the Instagram accounts seem to have mostly been in English — some were focused on celebrities, others political debate. We are

continuing to investigate these pages and have committed to updating the post once we know more. (<https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/11/election-update/>)

Election Teams

We are bolstering our inter-disciplinary teams to work on major elections. These teams include a range of relevant experts in areas like cybersecurity, election law, civic technology, and political use of the internet.

They work in partnership with external agencies such as election regulators, national cybersecurity teams and specialist NGOs to ensure we are putting in place the right measures to ensure our services contribute to free and fair elections. A good example of these partnerships is the work we are doing with the Atlantic Council to identify potential threats to elections, which is set out at <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/05/announcing-new-election-partnership-with-the-atlantic-council/>.

A good summary of the areas covered by these teams can be found in the transcript of a question and answer session that we held in July of this year, available at <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/07/qa-on-election-intergrity/>.

We recently shared more insights into how our teams work to protect elections by inviting media to observe the work of the team working on the mid-term elections in the US, which you can read here <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/10/war-room/>.

In Canada, we launched the Canadian Election Integrity Initiative two years in advance of the next federal election in 2019 to address concerns with respect to cybersecurity and misinformation. Through this initiative, we have worked closely with electoral commissions around the country to ensure the integrity of our platform for the three provincial elections held this year (<http://facebookcanadianelectionintegrityinitiative.com>).

Political Advertising

As you may know, we began by piloting an ad transparency test in Canada last November, where Canadian users were able to see all the ads that a Facebook Page was running, even if they were not in the intended audience. We have since rolled this feature out around the world. We have also been developing tools to improve transparency around political advertising. You can find out more about these tools in the announcement we made in May this year (<https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/05/ads-with-political-content/>) and in a follow-up report about the Ad Archive from October (<https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/10/ad-archive-report/>).

In addition to launching these tools in the US and Brazil, just last month we announced that we were bringing our authorisation process and Ad Library to the UK

as we step up efforts to increase transparency for ads related to politics (<https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/10/increasing-transparency-uk/>).

We recognise that there is a degree of complexity in this area, not least in defining what constitutes a political advertiser and in understanding the different approaches taken by different countries. We are continuing to develop and refine our solutions and are engaging with a number of interested parties including election regulators and governments as we do this.

I hope this gives you a sense of the work we have been doing in response to the concerns raised by your committees. If there is further specific information that would be useful please let us know and we will endeavor to answer your questions.

Yours sincerely,



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