



Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee

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I am writing in response to Facebook's reply to the letter I sent to you dated 22 October 2019. I do not believe that the Committee's concerns were fully addressed in this response. I note as well that once again you have failed to show the courtesy to the Committee of responding to our questions yourself.

Regarding the proposed merger and end-to-end encryption of Facebook Messenger, Instagram and WhatsApp, I do not understand the consumer argument to encrypt Facebook Messenger and Instagram, given users can already use an end-to-end encrypted Facebook service, WhatsApp.

Question 1: Why can't WhatsApp remain your only end-to-end encrypted service?

Regarding your response to my second question, whilst it indeed may be "*premature to give [us] an accurate answer on the types of metadata that could be available or indeed [...] may prove to be most meaningful to [your] safety efforts*", surely as your plans are to expand WhatsApp's end-to-end encryption to the new service, you should be able to determine if, as things currently stand, it is possible for someone to infer information based on a user's metadata. I again refer you to Kurt Opsahl of the Electronic Frontier Foundation's hypothesis, that one could infer the health status of a WhatsApp user if they contact in rapid succession an HIV testing service, then their doctor, then their health insurance company.

Question 2: Could you currently identify who a WhatsApp user is in contact with, in sequence and from that user's metadata?

Question 3: Do you currently use that metadata for advertising purposes?

Question 4: Can you categorically rule out using users' metadata from Facebook Messenger, Instagram or any other platform owned by your company for advertising purposes in future?



Regarding the recent changes in rules regarding political adverts, clearly your position stands in contrast to concerns raised by your own employees. As 250 Facebook employees expressed in The New York Times on 28 October, *“this policy [...] allows politicians to weaponize our platform by targeting people who believe that content posted by political figures is trustworthy”*. I agree with them as well that ‘free speech and paid speech are not the same thing.’

Question 5: Can you commit to, as your employees request, an open dialogue to address the widespread outcry regarding your fact-checking policy?

Question 6: Can you commit to implementing the proposals that your staff made in their open letter, in particular to hold political ads to the same standards as other ads, and restricting ad targeting for political ads?

Regarding the formalisation of your working relationship with third-party fact-checkers, I would like to draw your attention to Full Fact’s first report on Facebook’s Third-Party Fact Checking programme, published on 30 July 2019. Full Fact’s report made ten recommendations, including extending the programme to Instagram, adding more ratings to the existing system and more information on shares over time of flagged content.

Question 7: Can you commit to implementing the proposals contained in Full Fact’s report and to the continuation of the programme in future?

Finally, I note that you have recently contradicted your own policy by deciding to fact-check Adriel Hampton, in his capacity as a candidate running to be Governor of California in 2022. While I acknowledge that a spokesman for Facebook has told CNN Business that *“[Adriel Hampton] has made clear he registered as a candidate to get around our policies, so his content, including ads, will continue to be eligible for third-party fact-checking”*, I am concerned that this case, while demonstrating that you can fact-check politicians, indicates that you may specifically target political figures who seek to point out the possibility to misinform the public on your platform.

Question 8: Rather than pick and choose for your own purposes which candidates you will or won’t fact-check surely a general policy allowing for the fact-checking by Facebook of politicians and political candidates would address such inconsistencies in your approach, while preserving electoral integrity?

I look forward to a response at your earliest convenience.

DAMIAN COLLINS MP
Chair, Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee