



Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA
Tel 020 7219 6120 website www.parliament.uk/cms

Facebook UK
1 Rathbone Square
Fitzrovia
London
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7 May 2020

Dear Mr. Earley,

Further questions on measures to tackle the COVID-19 Infodemic

In evidence to the Committee on 30 April 2020, you stated that [emphasis added]:

“Any person who has interacted with a piece of content that our fact checkers subsequently rate as false will receive a notification from us linking them to the debunk provided by the fact checker. That is the case for misinformation **that we apply these actions to.**”¹

However, on 16 April, Facebook’s Vice-President of Integrity Guy Rosen stated in a blog post that “[w]e’re going to start showing messages in News Feed to people who have liked, reacted or commented on harmful misinformation about COVID-19 that we have since removed”, which refers to the fact that the tool is yet to be rolled out.² Your colleague Rebecca Stimson has indirectly confirmed this in an email to MPs dated 4 May 2020.

I therefore request answers to the following additional points:

1. When will the new tool to show News Feed messages to people who have engaged with misinformation be rolled out in full to UK users? Will there be a phased release, i.e. will users in different territories have the tool rolled out at different times? Will a beta version be trialled beforehand?
2. Why does the tool only provide messages to users who engage with false content rather than those who see it, given your platform also measures signals such as impressions, reach, time spent on the post, click-through rate, video retention, etc, and thus will know who has seen misleading content without engaging with it?
3. Will this tool be backdated in any way, i.e. will a user who engaged with misinformation before the tool’s roll out be notified of corrections through the tool after its roll out?
4. Will this tool only apply to misinformation and disinformation around the novel coronavirus and COVID-19, or will it be used to tackle misinformation and disinformation in general? What is the reason for this decision? If it is to be rolled out more broadly, how will misinformation and disinformation be identified?

¹ Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Sub-Committee on Online Harms and Disinformation, *Online Harms and Disinformation*, 30 April 2020, HC234 Q94.

² Guy Rosen, [An Update on Our Work to Keep People Informed and Limit Misinformation About COVID-19](#) (16 April 2020).



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In his post, Mr. Rosen stated that the tool will apply to posts “leading to imminent physical harm”.³ Ms. Stimson also recently stated that:

“[s]ome misinformation could lead to physical harm if people believe it. Under our existing policies against harmful misinformation, and following recent guidance from health authorities and governments, we are removing false claims about the virus”.

Examples of ‘harmful’ misinformation (as defined by Facebook) were given as “false information about prevention and transmission, treatment and cures, ... the availability of essential services” and “content that falsely links 5G technology to COVID-19”.

Whilst such action is welcomed by the Committee, there are concerns that this has not been defined clearly or transparently, and may overlook misinformation that causes non-physical, indirect or vicarious harm.

5. How does Facebook define “harmful misinformation” and “imminent physical harm”, and can you confirm that this extends to non-physical, indirect, vicarious or other forms of harm? Can you also specifically confirm that these examples are covered by your definition and clarify your logic when considering whether to take action:
 - a. the ‘Stanford Hospital/St. George’s Hospital medical advice’ posts⁴;
 - b. 5G conspiracy theory posts⁵;
 - c. the ‘St. Mary’s bodybags’ video⁶; and
 - d. the ‘crowded mosque’ photo⁷.

The need to pose further questions emphasises the points I made in my earlier letter that detailed information is needed for parliamentary scrutiny to be effective. I therefore hope that you take this opportunity to respond to both letters in the fullest possible manner.

The Committee requests a response by 14 May 2020.

Yours sincerely,

Julian Knight MP
Chair, Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ The Verge, [A viral list of dubious coronavirus tips claims to be from Stanford — it isn't](#) (12 March 2020).

⁵ Full Fact, [Here's where those 5G and coronavirus conspiracy theories came from](#) (9 April 2020).

⁶ Full Fact, [This video of body bags in a hospital was not filmed in St Mary's, London](#) (6 April 2020).

⁷ Full Fact, [Photo circulating of busy mosque was taken before lockdown](#) (31 March 2020).