

Home Affairs Committee

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Tara Hopkins
Director of Public Policy EMEA, Instagram
Facebook
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1 December 2021

Dear Ms Hopkins,

Thank you for your letter on 29 September 2021. We appreciate the swift action taken on the offending accounts and posts we identified to you during the evidence session. However, the 5 pieces of content raised by the Committee had been online for weeks, and it should not take a body such as this Committee to report it before such action is taken.

Moderation and reporting processes

The torrent of racist abuse following the Euros final, and the failure to identify and remove such content in its totality after such a significant period of time, suggests that Facebook and Instagram's moderation processes are inefficient at tackling racist abuse.

- What will Facebook and Instagram change about their moderation processes to ensure that, in future, when users report racist abuse, the unacceptable comments are dealt with swiftly?
- Evidence given to the Joint Committee on the Draft Online Safety Bill in September indicated that social media platforms severely lack transparency (see: [Q8 and Q13](#)). What steps will Facebook (now Meta) take to increase its transparency, particularly in relation to its moderation of hateful content including racist content?

In your letter you mention the importance of in-app reporting of racist abuse. However, evidence from the panel of former footballers and the PFA on 8 September indicated to us that there are cases where they (or someone on their behalf) reported a post or comment as racist and Instagram has failed to remove the offending content because it did not violate its hate speech policies (see: [Q172; 177; 178](#)).

Failure to remove the offending content suggests to us that Facebook and Instagram's hate speech policies leave major gaps through which overtly racist language and emojis can, and do, fall. One example of this from July 2021 can be found [here](#), where one user reported racist content on Instagram but was later told such content did not violate Instagram's Community Guidelines. In our view, this bolsters racist sentiment and attitudes. It is clear that your company's hate speech policies are failing to protect users. Where a player (or someone acting on their behalf) reports an offensive post, it should be reviewed and taken down immediately. Indeed, doing so would likely

increase users' confidence to report abusive and offensive content. In turn, this would likely encourage an increase in the use of in-app reporting mechanisms on Facebook and Instagram.

- Will Facebook/Meta commit to undertaking a review, in the next six months, of whether its hate speech policies are capable of tackling and preventing racist abuse on its platforms?
- Will Facebook/Meta also commit to undertaking a review, in the next six months, into whether its reporting processes are fit for purpose? Specifically, that content reported as racist is responded to swiftly and properly investigated?
- Will Facebook/Meta commit to making the details of both reviews public?
- Will Facebook/Meta ensure that such reviews will involve people with lived experience of racist abuse, including (but not limited to) footballers?
- In the next six months, will Facebook/Meta commit to imposing tougher sanctions on account holders who publish racist posts or comments?

Testimony of Frances Haugen

Finally, we note that Frances Haugen, a Facebook/Meta whistleblower, recently filed multiple complaints with the United States' Securities and Exchange Commission. She also submitted evidence to the United States Congress on 5 October regarding her views on the harms Facebook/Meta causes to society, based on internal documents.

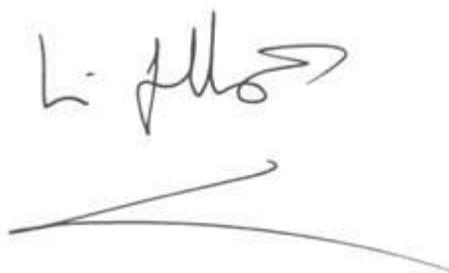
It has been reported that one of the complaints filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission alleges that Facebook/Meta fails to take sufficient action regarding hateful content. Representatives of Facebook/Meta have refuted the claims, and Mark Zuckerberg also published a response following Ms Haugen's testimony to Congress. However, it is very concerning that Ms Haugen's claims speak to the evidence that this Committee, and other parliamentary Committees such as the Joint Committee on the Draft Online Safety Bill, have received.

These are but a few examples of the increasing dialogue in society regarding the potential harms caused by Facebook/Meta. Calls for reform of Facebook/Meta's processes to mitigate such harms are increasing.

- Why is it that, despite these calls, and despite Facebook/Meta's ability to finance such changes, the company fails to take swift and widescale action across all its platforms?

Please respond by 16 December 2021.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Loughton', with a long horizontal line underneath it.

Tim Loughton MP
Acting Chair of the Home Affairs Committee