

Facebook—written evidence (FOJ0089)

Lords Communications and Digital Committee Inquiry into The Future of Journalism

The Facebook Company (“Facebook”) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Lords Communications and Digital Committee’s call for evidence into the future of journalism.

We note that the aim of this work is to investigate how the production and consumption of journalism is changing, how journalists can be supported to adapt to those changes and how the profession can become more trusted by—and representative of—the general population. We also acknowledge the Committee’s request that responses to this call to evidence focus on questions that overlap with respondents’ specialisms. On this basis, our response will focus on how digital technologies have changed the consumption of journalism; how digital technologies have changed the production of journalism; how innovation and collaboration help news providers of all types to maintain sustainable business models and adapt what they produce to audience demand; and media and digital literacy.

1. Introduction

Founded in 2004, Facebook was built to help people stay connected and bring us closer together with the people that matter to us. Our mission is to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together. We’re committed to building technologies that enable the best of what people can do together. Our products empower around 3 billion people around the world to share ideas, offer support and make a difference. Over \$2 billion has been raised by our community to support the causes they care about, 160 million businesses use our apps to connect with customers and grow, over 100 billion messages are shared every day to help people stay close even when they are far apart and over 1 billion stories are shared every day help people express themselves and connect.

One of the goals of the Facebook platform is to build an informed global community. By reducing the cost of distribution, more publishers can create and distribute content to more people - and do it faster and more easily. We do, however, recognize that it is our responsibility as an information distributor to amplify the good effects of information sharing and mitigate the bad.

Facebook helps journalists build and engage their audiences and provides them with tools to monetise their content. We also provide services to help journalists manage the transition from print to digital content distribution.

The problem of misinformation on our platform is complex but we tend to agree with those who say that it shouldn’t be for tech companies to decide what is true or false. Since 2017, we have partnered with three Independent third party fact checkers, all of which are certified through the International Fact Checking Network. With regard to news, we know that we need to strike the right balance between giving journalists space to express their opinions, and protecting our users from harm. This response will address this changing journalistic landscape and explain what Facebook is doing as a company to support the journalism industry and ensure that our users can consume a varied and high-quality selection of news sources.

2. How digital technologies have changed the consumption of journalism

2.1 Consumption of news from digital sources

The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism and University of Oxford released a [study](#) into online news and media use in the general election in 2019, which provided a useful cross-section of how people consume news online around major political events. They tracked 1,711 people's news consumption through mobile and desktop devices during the campaign period, and surveyed them after voting had taken place.

The study showed that only 3% of all time on the internet was spent on the news, compared to 30% on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Similarly, throughout the campaign only 18% accessed one or more news apps, compared to 66% who looked at Facebook, 64% who used WhatsApp and 27% using Twitter. 41% of respondents had used social media to access news in the last week, compared to a third using the radio and a quarter reading newspapers. 56% had used news websites.

People who accessed the news through social media accessed more varied sources of news, than those who didn't, despite reading a similar number of stories. They also had higher levels of cross-cutting news exposure than average, so saw more news from opposing political views. The data found no supporting evidence that Facebook, Twitter and Google use data to create echo chambers of news outlets users agree with.

The internet is not the first technology to spark a paradigm shift in the media industry. The introduction of radio, television, and then cable news all created major disruption in the way news is distributed and consumed. These new technologies presented both challenges and opportunities for news publishers, as well as many benefits to consumers.

The internet is no different. It presents a new set of challenges and opportunities for both journalists and publishers.

2.2 Quality of news on Facebook

Despite the trends towards the digital consumption of news outlined above, news media is a small part of the content on Facebook. However, Facebook is still a platform on which almost all reputable news outlets choose to share news. People benefit in a variety of ways from accessing news content through Facebook - the platform is used by countless local, national and international news organisations and it allows people to access news on a variety of devices wherever they can find an internet connection.

Facebook directs significant amounts of traffic away from our platform and onto news websites and the publisher has complete control over whether users are directed towards them and over who can access their content. Many news sites encourage their readers to share their content on Facebook with share buttons at the top of their articles.

Facebook also encourages interaction and critical engagement with news through reactions and comments, as well as allowing users to share interesting content with their friends. We allow people to take action quickly in response to news media content. For example, after reading news about a natural disaster, people can click on a "donate" button to give money to communities affected by the disaster.

People can also "like" or "follow" the publisher's Page, which will make posts by the publisher more likely to appear in a person's News Feed. *BBC News*, for example, has a [Facebook Page](#) that is liked by over 51.5 million people and followed by over 53 million people. These people are more likely to see content from *BBC News* in their News Feed than people who have not liked or followed the Page. We publish regular updates to our News Feed FYI blog as part of our continued efforts to be transparent about how News Feed works so that media content creators will understand how content is ranked and displayed in News Feed.

2.3 Tackling misinformation

We recognise misinformation and disinformation present threats to the quality of news consumed on our platforms, and to the integrity of our users' experience. This is why we have taken a number of measures to combat the prevalence and accessibility of false news sources on all of our platforms.

Facebook works with over 60 fact-checking organisations in more than 50 languages to help us tackle misinformation. In the UK, our partners are Full Fact, FactCheckNI, and as of March, Reuters UK. Once a piece of content is rated false by fact-checkers, we show it lower in Feeds so fewer people see it, we notify people who shared it, and we cover it with a warning label that gives people more context.

We work with independent fact checkers because we tend to agree with the view that it is not for technology companies to decide what is true and what is false. We also recognise that we need to strike right balance between giving users space to express themselves, and protecting them from harm.

We believe the right answer is to limit the spread of content rated false so that people are less likely to see it, however we recognise that some types of misinformation have the potential to lead to physical harm, particularly during the ongoing health crisis. For this type of misinformation, we work with outside experts, including health authorities, to identify and remove it. It is against our Community Standards to post misinformation that could lead to physical harm.

2.4 Tackling misinformation relating to COVID-19

Misinformation has been one of the key emerging harms during the COVID-19 crisis. In the context of coronavirus, misinformation can include:

- **False information about the existence or severity of COVID-19**, including, but not limited to: claims that COVID-19 does not exist, is not a pandemic, or that it is no more dangerous to people than the common cold or flu; and claims that COVID-19 government social distancing orders are a means of installing 5G wireless communication technology infrastructure or that the symptoms of COVID-19 are actually a result of 5G wireless technologies;
- **False information about the means of preventing COVID-19**, including, but not limited to: claims that something prevents someone from getting COVID-19 (e.g. existing vaccines, dietary practices, aromatherapy and essential oils); and misrepresentations of government guidance about the means for preventing the spread of COVID-19;
- **False information about how COVID-19 is transmitted**, including, but not limited to: claims that any group is immune or cannot die from COVID-19 (e.g., children, people of certain races), or that a specific treatment or activity results in guaranteed immunity; and claims that 5G wireless communication technology causes the transmission of COVID-19;
- **False information about cures, treatments, and tests for COVID-19, and false information about availability of essential services**, including, but not limited to, claims that essential services are now or soon to become unavailable, unless the appropriate governmental authority has publicly confirmed that information.

During the month of April, we displayed warning labels on around 50 million pieces of content related to COVID-19 on Facebook, based on around 7,500 articles by our

independent fact-checking partners. The equivalent figure for March was that we displayed warning labels on around 40 million pieces of content. When people saw those warning labels, 95% of the time they did not click to view the original content.

Since 1 March, we've removed more than 2.5 million pieces of organic content for the sale of masks, hand sanitizers, surface disinfecting wipes and COVID-19 test kits.

To date, we've directed over 2 billion people to resources from health authorities including the NHS and GOV.uk through our COVID-19 Information Centre and pop-ups on Facebook and Instagram.

3. How digital technologies have changed the production of journalism

3.1 Facebook tools for journalists

Facebook enables publishers of all sizes to find new audiences and engage with their current audience by providing them with a free platform for global content distribution and a variety of tools (many of which are also free) to promote and monetise their content. Distribution of news content via Facebook and other digital platforms has enabled news publishers to become established and to flourish around the world, including in the UK.

Publishers may choose to establish a free Facebook Page for their publication - a public profile that can be established by a public figure, business, organisation, or other entity to create an authentic and public presence on Facebook. Then, publishers choose what content they would like to make available on Facebook. Publishers may distribute their articles for free by posting them to their Page, or by making them Instant Articles (see section 3.2). When a publisher establishes a Facebook Page, it can also post other types of written content, photos, or videos, schedule events, and provide information about itself - all for free.

News media can also be shared by a person using Facebook. A person may post a link to news media content offered by a publisher anywhere on the internet. If someone clicks on the link, they will either be taken to the publisher's website or, if the publisher has chosen to make that content available through Instant Articles, the shared article will instantly render as an Instant Article. When news content is shared by people on Facebook, the publisher retains control over access to the content. If the publisher has chosen to put the shared content behind a paywall, then anyone clicking the link will need to pay the necessary fee to access and read the shared article on the publisher's site. Many publishers encourage article sharing by placing share buttons on their websites.

3.2 Instant Articles

Instant Articles allow a publisher to post a full article on Facebook, meaning any user who clicks on an Instant Article can access the article without having to navigate to a different website or wait for the article to load. Instant Articles load over 4x faster than mobile web across regions and devices, meaning lower bounce rates and deeper engagement. Over 65 of the top 100 most-clicked domains on Facebook use Instant Articles. Instant Articles deliver more traffic to publishers and are more likely to be shared than mobile web equivalents. People are also over 70% less likely to abandon an Instant Article due to the fast load time. On average, people read more articles when they see Instant Articles in their News Feed.

Instant Articles give publishers the ability to sell their own ads, drive newsletter sign-ups, and monitor and track their traffic. If a publisher sells the ad itself, then it retains all of the associated revenue. If the publisher relies on us to back fill the ads through the

Facebook Audience Network, then we and the publisher each earn a share of the resulting ad revenue.

A publisher may choose whether to distribute their content via Instant Articles or not.

3.3 News Gathering on Facebook

Journalists use Facebook as a tool to support their news gathering and story writing process. For example, journalists use Facebook to discover untold stories and as a communication tool to reach out to individuals. We also provide tools to journalists at no cost to support news gathering and reporting, such as our CrowdTangle tool. CrowdTangle provides detailed social media analytics to help media content creators measure their performance on social media and identify great stories. In 2018, we launched CrowdTangle for Local News, which helps newsrooms find local stories.

4. How innovation and collaboration help news providers of all types to maintain sustainable business models and adapt what they produce to audience demand

4.1 Helping the journalism industry transition to digital content distribution

Over the past several decades, innovation and technological change have resulted in significant shifts worldwide in the way that information is accessed and consumed. For publishers and journalists, these changes have created challenges and uncertainties, as well as opportunities. We actively collaborate with media content creators to support them in maximising their reach and engagement on our services and to learn how to be a better partner.

Our Media Partnerships Team works with media companies and media creators of all sizes to assist them in achieving their objectives on Facebook and to collaborate on relevant product development, so that publishers can build new audiences, engage with their current audiences, gather and promote news, and build their businesses through advertising, branded content and subscriptions.

In January 2017, we launched the Facebook Journalism Project to support journalism globally and to build stronger relationships with the media community. Through this Project, we are collaborating with journalists and publishers to develop products, learning from journalists about ways we can be a better partner, and working with publishers and editors on how we can equip people with the knowledge they need to be informed readers in the digital age.

The [Facebook Journalism Project](#) has three pillars:

1. Build Community Through News

We work with and invest in organizations that fund quality journalism and help build sustainable futures for community-based news.

2. Train Newsrooms Globally

We visit newsrooms and offer online courses to train journalists on how to leverage social tools to tell stories that matter.

3. Quality Through Partnerships

We partner with news publishers and nonprofits to combat misinformation, promote news literacy, fund new initiatives, share best practices, and improve journalism on our platforms.

Facebook has several online courses for journalists – including a certified course in partnership with the Poynter Institute that has been taken by more than 100,000 people across the world. Our work with publishers in terms of in person newsroom trainings (for example a recent training on Instagram for 70 journalists in a UK newsroom), workshops and online webinars (again we recently conducted one on our community standards for publishers) enable journalists to learn more skills, think strategically about how to deploy them and future proof their careers.

Furthermore, last December we partnered with Reuters to launch a new e-learning course for journalists on how to spot content that has been manipulated before being published on social media. The course was launched in four languages, English, Spanish, Arabic and French and last month won a Webby, one of the most prestigious online awards.

4.2 UK work to support journalists produce and distribute content digitally

Facebook delivers in person and at scale training to journalists across the UK. Our training sessions are bespoke and conducted following surveys with relevant newsrooms, so content and skills sharing is best catered to their needs. We have trained hundreds of UK journalists across the country in the past 12 months alone in a variety of ways, from immersive accelerators to online courses to in person workshops, in newsroom trainings, webinars and more. We are also looking to train the journalists of the future.

In partnership with the regional press, we launched the [Community News Project](#) in 2018, a £4.5 million fund to support local journalism across the UK. This investment has enabled the National Council for Training of Journalists to oversee the recruitment of “community journalists” and place them at the heart of local newsrooms on a two-year scheme. The goal is to encourage more reporting from towns which have lost their local newspaper and beat reporters, as well as communities that have been underserved historically.

We currently have just under 80 journalists on this \$6m project, more than 60% of whom are from diverse backgrounds, which has resulted in more than 170 front pages across the country and hundreds of stories in communities traditionally underserved by news media. Furthermore, all the CNP journalists will complete an officially certified National Council for the Training of Journalists course to help future proof their careers and share the learnings in their newsrooms.

On 9 April, the Facebook Journalism Project (FJP) and the European Journalism Centre (EJC), a non-profit organisation with a history working with publishers across the continent, announced [the European Journalism COVID-19 Support Fund](#) to help journalists in Europe cover important stories when we all need them most. EJC will direct emergency funds via the \$3 million that Facebook is investing to small and mid-sized news organizations and journalists most in need in the hardest hit countries across Europe, in order to support their businesses and ongoing COVID-19 reporting in local communities.

4.3 Helping publishers monetise their content on Facebook

We help publishers of all sizes build and maintain their businesses. We provide tools to support publishers across the full spectrum of business models - whether subscription-based, ad-based, or a hybrid. We have also created a suite of features that enable publishers to earn the majority, and in many cases all, of the revenue for their content

when it is shared on Facebook - and off Facebook, on their own mobile sites and apps through the Facebook Audience Network.

We offer publishers a variety of ways to monetise their content on Facebook:

- Publishers can serve all their own advertising in Instant Articles and receive 100% of the revenue and control pricing for other features.
- Publishers can implement a payment wall. Paywalls give publishers control over access to their content and give them a mechanism to convert readers to paid subscribers.
- Publishers can use a variety of advertising tools, including subscription calls to action and publisher bar upsells, to drive subscriptions.
- Publishers can build their user base by promoting their offerings or email lists, which will enable them to convert users to paid subscribers or serve ads in the future.
- Publishers can take advantage of industry-specific tools we have created for them. For example, Branded Content allows publishers to extend their brand deals to Facebook.

An example of our work to help publishers use an ads-supported model is In-Stream Ads, which are central to our long-form video service, Facebook Watch. In-Stream Ads are short ads that appear before, during, or after videos. Whenever an in-stream ad is shown, the publisher or creator earns a share of the resulting ad revenue. We continue to enhance in-stream ads with new features and functionality to support monetising more types of video content,

Another innovative feature that we have created is Stars. Already popular on Facebook with gaming creators, Stars is a new tool to earn money on live videos. Viewers can buy and send Stars to performers during live videos or videos on demand, and they in turn earn money from Facebook for the Stars they receive. We are rapidly expanding access to Stars for content creators, cultural institutions, media publishers and musicians. Our initial expansion has been in the US, UK, and Italy, with other markets to follow.

We also help publishers monetise off Facebook. By participating in Facebook Audience Network, publishers can monetise and create engaging ad experiences on their own apps or mobile websites, through a combination of access to Facebook advertisers and people-based marketing. Publishers retain the majority of the revenue for advertisements placed on their sites through Facebook Audience Network.

5. Media and digital literacy

5.1 Working to build an informed community

At Facebook, we have worked to equip young people in the UK to spot misinformation, and improve their digital literacy.

In February 2020, we became a partner of the Economist Foundation's flagship programme, The Burnett News Club. Our funding has supported the creation of free resources for parents, teachers and young people on current affairs and news literacy. As of May 1st 2020 there were 10,720 subscribers of teachers and parents to these resources.

Our funding also provides a subsidy to support 30 UK secondary schools to attend the Burnett News Club's year long programme across school year 2020/21.

We have also supported news literacy and fake news resources creation by The Diana Award and Stand Up! Education during 2020.

In August 2018 we [launched](#) our [Digital Literacy Library](#), a collection of lessons to help young people think critically and share thoughtfully online. There are [830 million young people online](#) around the world, and this library is a resource for educators looking to address digital literacy and help these young people build the skills they need to safely enjoy digital technology.

To help equip young people in the UK to spot false news, and improve their digital literacy, we worked with the APPG on Literacy, the National Literacy Trust, First News, and The Day to launch the Commission on Fake News and the Teaching of Critical Literacy Skills in Schools. As part of this work, we are working with these partners to survey young people on their experiences of fake news and help evidence gathering in this area.

We are also a contributor to the Media Smart media literacy programme for 7 to 16 year olds. It has free educational resources for teachers, parents and young people - including a dedicated body image programme for boys and girls. Media Smart helps young people think critically about the advertising they come across in their daily lives using real and current examples of advertising that we're all familiar with to help teach core media literacy skills.

We have long believed that empowering people to be digitally savvy is key. This is why we invest in a whole range of tools to give people control over their experience on Facebook - everything from what kind of ads you see to managing your screen time - and we partner with a number of organisations to deliver digital literacy training, safety skills training and resources to young people, parents and teachers.

Through our partnership with Freeformers, we have delivered in-person digital skills training to 12,500 people. We offered a free of charge, four-hour session, delivered by expert partners including Supa Talent and Lancashire Adult Learning, which utilised the bespoke curriculum we developed with academic researchers to give learners the confidence and skills they need for future employment in a digital economy.

When it comes to the Online Harms White Paper, the promise of a coordinated and strategic media literacy strategy from the Government is something we're excited to see.

5.2 Supporting an informed electorate

Media and digital literacy is a key issue during election periods. People are already using Facebook to talk about politics and issues that matter to them and to communicate with their elected officials. We are committed to supporting them and making it easier to vote and connect to reliable information.

For the 2019 general election in the UK, we launched several products to encourage voter participation as well as supported campaigns to promote media literacy. In partnership with our UK fact checkers - Full Fact and Factcheck NI - we launched a media literacy ad campaign that provided tips for spotting false news. The campaign reached over 11 million people.

We funded another ad campaign by Full Fact for their election quiz, which aimed to educate users on how to spot what's fact or fiction. To help voters find polling information, we funded an ad campaign for the Democracy Club, a civic partner that also

works with the Electoral Commission, to promote their [voter information site](#). We also supported newsrooms across the country to ensure journalists had the tools they needed to cover the elections and trained them on how to spot false news on our platforms.

Facebook is also a member of the BBC's Trusted News Initiative, through which during the election we and a number of other social media networks establish a dedicated escalations channel for publishers. Publishers could forward misinformation they spotted to the channel and the appropriate platform would action it as appropriate.

There were also weekly calls of the group, which is an opportunity for platforms to share information with publishers and vice versa, an information sharing and connection exchange which supplements the channel. This partnership proved to be a productive forum, and in the context of the current coronavirus crisis we have reactivated the dedicated channel initiative.

During the final days of the voter registration period, we launched our Voter Registration Reminder which was displayed in the News Feed. The [UK Electoral Commission reported](#) that over 335,000 registrations came from Facebook, which accounted for approximately 22% of registrations during the 5-day period that the VRR was up. On election day, we launched several products, including our 'Share You Voted' button and 'Vote' and 'I Voted' stickers - to encourage participation which were featured in [local newspapers](#).

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