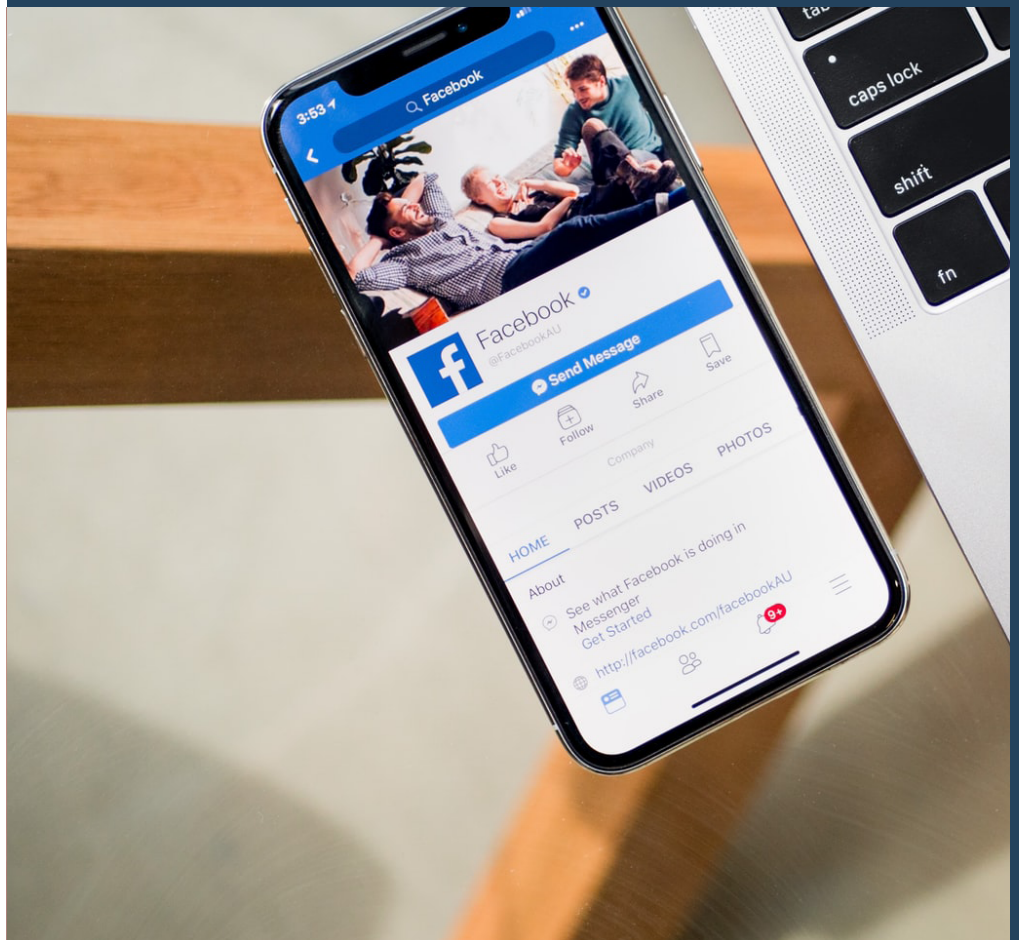


POLICY THUMBNAIL

Let Me Speak Free, But Tell Me No Lies

Giving Citizens Control Over The Accuracy
Of Their Social Media Timelines



JANUARY
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THE PROBLEM

Social media platforms engage everyone's interests by spreading posts which are already attracting other people's attention, and by sending each of us new posts about things we've shown interest in before. But their algorithms also create 2 problems:

- 1) They increase opportunities for bad actors to post attention-grabbing but deliberately inaccurate or one-sided information to scam or defraud families, companies and charities, or to undermine the reputations of particular people, commercial brands & democratic institutions. AI makes this worse because highly-convincing deepfakes are getting easier, cheaper and faster to make and circulate than ever before. Most are now impossible for the naked eye or ear to spot without digital checks

to help identify them.

- 2) They create 'radicalisation rabbit-holes' where users are shown more & more posts which are increasingly one-sided and irrational. This ultimately leads users into intolerant online echo-chambers (on topics like Islamic jihad, political alt-right or hard left, incels, vaccine effectiveness or chemtrails) where they are never presented with the other side of an argument, where dissenting or alternative views are shouted down, and where polarisation, division & potentially-violent extremism flourish.

THE SOLUTION

- a) Require big social media platforms to give their users easy-to-use tools to decide whether & how they want posts which are factually inaccurate or made up to appear in their timelines or not. The tools would use proven, independent international journalistic and content-provenance standards for assessing factual accuracy, to prevent meddling by big tech bosses or politicians.

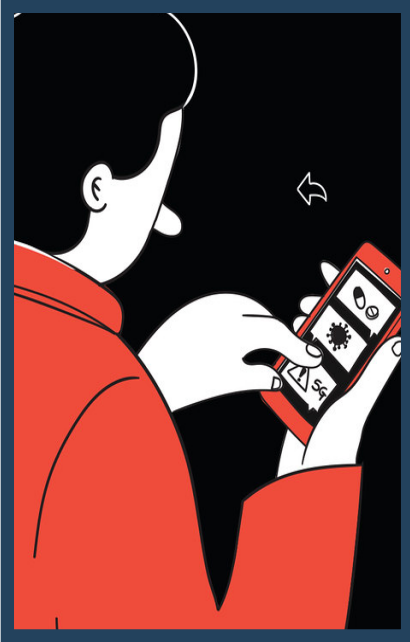


- b) Extend Ofcom's proven and longstanding 'Duty of Balance & Undue Prominence' which has successfully prevented radicalisation rabbit-holes in UK TV & Radio broadcast media for decades, to apply to social media algorithms so they can't send users more & more extreme posts about a topic without including the other side of an argument too.

THE BENEFITS

These 2 changes will:

- Preserve free speech by giving social media users the power to decide whether & how factually-inaccurate posts appear in their timelines, instead of big tech bosses, politicians or regulators making the decisions for them.



- Use proven, independent, international standards for assessing factual accuracy so foreign states, domestic politicians, big-tech bosses or vested interests can't tilt the rules to favour their own interests.
- Give factually-accurate reports from high-quality citizen-journalists a level playing field to compete successfully against established mainstream media outlets.
- Forge consensus & rational debate instead of sowing division and spreading lies.
- Protect UK society & democracy from foreign states & other bad actors who want to weaken us.
- Protect the reputations of UK citizens and brands (along with the jobs of people who provide them) from being damaged or destroyed by people spreading lies about them.

THE SOUNDBITES

Free speech means giving citizens the tools to see & hear both sides of an argument, rather than silencing people who don't agree.

Democracy means letting people see if something is factually accurate or not, so they can choose whether they agree with it without tech bosses, politicians or regulators telling them what to think.

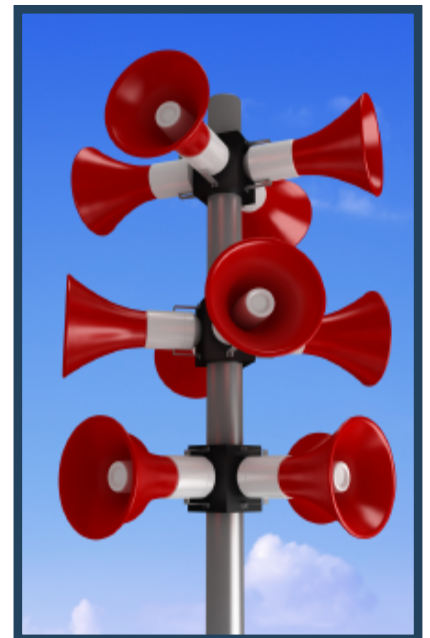
If high-quality citizen-journalists post factually-accurate news that mainstream media ignores, why shouldn't they compete successfully against the big established channels?

A lie is halfway around the world before the truth has got its pants on [Winston Churchill]

The opposite of knowledge is not ignorance, but deceit and fraud [Jean Baudrillard]

I'm not upset that you lied to me, I'm upset that from now on I can't believe you. [Friedrich Nietzsche]

High-trust societies are richer and work better, because everything goes faster and cheaper if people don't need lawyers or police. Britain's enemies would like nothing better than for us to distrust each other and start fighting amongst ourselves.



THE REBUTTALS



1. *Isn't this all a bit Orwellian, setting up a Ministry of Truth?*

Far from it. We're using independent, international standards to give citizens more control over what they see on social media, and how they see it.

2. *Isn't this exactly what the Mainstream Media want; stopping free speech by regulating their successful new online rivals?*

Quite the opposite. These changes will give high-quality citizen-journalists a level playing field to publish factually-accurate news reports that compete successfully against established mainstream media outlets. The only people who will suffer are the ones who want to carry on telling lies without any consequences.

3. *Why are you worried about forging consensus and social cohesion? Surely democracy and free speech means people should be able to disagree?*

Yes they should. But if everybody disagrees with everybody else about everything, you haven't got a society in the first place. Successful, peaceful, prosperous countries and communities need enough shared beliefs, culture and values for everyone to get along, so we should treat deliberate attempts to undermine them by spreading lies very seriously indeed.

