Facebook's submission to the Senate Select Committee on Foreign Interference through Social Media

21 SEPTEMBER 2020

FACEBOOK

Executive summary

Facebook welcomes the opportunity to provide information to assist the work of the Senate Committee on Foreign Interference through Social Media.

Foreign interference or influence operations can amplify distrust in the integrity of elections, governance and civic discourse broadly and undermine the community's confidence in democracy. Combatting these operations is a critical, continuous challenge for governments, industry, media, civil society and academia, and cross-sector cooperation is essential to combat sophisticated bad actors and preserve the community's faith in democracy.

Foreign interference or influence can manifest on social media (as well as other avenues for interference and influence), and Facebook has substantially increased our investments in tools, technology and infrastructure to enforce our policies and promote authentic communications via our services.

We are committed to working with policymakers and partners around the world to meet this challenge, including in Australia. We also want to work constructively with policymakers in shaping the rules for the internet: our CEO Mark Zuckerberg has been calling for new regulation around numerous areas, including election integrity.[1] In Australia, we have supported changes to strengthen political advertising laws[2], and we've been closely involved with a voluntary industry effort to develop a Disinformation Code, as per the Government's request last year.[3]

In particular, we especially want to work with liberal democracies, like Australia, that share the values of the United States and American technology companies, rather than allowing rules to be set by countries and companies that propagate very different visions for the future of the internet.

Foreign interference and influence are closely related - but distinct from - related issues such as disinformation, misinformation and electoral integrity. Facebook has invested heavily in combatting disinformation and misinformation, and safeguarding electoral integrity, and this submission sets out the full list of current efforts on this front, including:

- **Detecting and removing networks of *coordinated inauthentic behaviour* (CIB)**

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[1] M Zuckerberg, 'The Internet needs new rules. Let's start in these four areas', *Washington Post*, 31 March 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/mark-zuckerberg-the-internet-needs-new-rules-lets-start-in-these-four-areas/2019/03/29/9e6f0504-521a-11e9-a3f7-78b7525a8d5f_story.html; M Zuckerberg, 'Big Tech needs more regulation', *Financial Times*, 17 February 2020, https://www.ft.com/content/602ec7ec-4f18-11ea-95a0-43d18ec715f5

[2] Facebook, *Submission to the Digital Platforms Inquiry*, March 2019, https://www.accc.gov.au/system/files/Facebook%20Australia%20%28March%202019%29.PDF

[3] Australian Government, *Regulating for the Digital Age*, December 2019, https://treasury.gov.au/publication/p2019-41708

- **Reporting transparently on our efforts**, through monthly reports on CIB[4] and our Community Standards Enforcement Report[5]

- **Removing certain categories of misinformation that could cause imminent, physical harm** - including around COVID-19. Between April and June this year, we removed 7 million posts for spreading harmful misinformation about COVID-19.

  We also remove other categories of misinformation, including "deepfakes" or manipulated media[6], and misinformation about voting that may constitute voter suppression.

- **Fact-checking misinformation**, through our partnerships under which we pay 70 independent fact-checking organisations around the world (including, in Australia, Agence France Presse and Australian Association Press) to undertake this important work. Once a post is found to be false, we apply a warning label that indicates it is false and shows a debunking article from the fact checker. It is not possible to see the content without clicking past the warning label. When people see these warning labels, 95% of the time they do not go on to view the original content. We have applied the label and reduced the distribution of more than 98 million posts worldwide, based on 7,500 fact-checks.

- **Working with government and NGOs to elevate authoritative sources of information**. We have launched a global Coronavirus Information Centre (which Australia was one of the first countries to receive) and we have been running prompts on Facebook and Instagram to direct Australians to information from the Australian Government. These have been seen by every Facebook and Instagram user in Australia multiple times, either in their Feeds or when they search for coronavirus-related terms. We also partnered with the Australian Government to launch a COVID-19 chatbot on WhatsApp.

- **Providing labelling and other signals to users about the trustworthiness of information**, so that people can better understand the source and context of content they see on our services.

- **Bringing transparency to political advertising** so that people can understand the source of context of political ads on our services to promote debate, analysis and accountability. We do this through: our industry-leading Ad Library, authorisation requirements for anyone running political ads, and an Ad Library API that allows for greater scrutiny of advertisers and Facebook[7]

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[4] Available at about.fb.com/news/tag/coordinated-inauthentic-behavior/
[5] Facebook, *Community Standards Enforcement Report*, https://transparency.facebook.com/community-standards-enforcement#fake-accounts
[6] M Bickert, *Enforcing Against Manipulated Media*, https://about.fb.com/news/2020/01/enforcing-against-manipulated-media/, 6 January 2020.
[7] S Schiff, *Offering Greater Transparency for Social Issue, Electoral and Political Ads In More Countries*, https://about.fb.com/news/2019/06/offering-greater-transparency/; R Leathern, *Expanded Transparency and More Controls for Political Ads*, https://about.fb.com/news/2020/01/political-ads/

- **Working with governments to uphold electoral laws**, including working with the Australian Government's Election Integrity Taskforce in the 2019 election.

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Defining "foreign interference"

In the debate about foreign interference, there can sometimes be conflation and confusion between concepts such as foreign interference / influence, disinformation and misinformation.

In relation to the Committee's primary focus of "foreign interference", the closest term that Facebook uses is *coordinated inauthentic behaviour* (CIB). In the social media landscape and beyond, foreign interference relies on **inauthenticity** -- where users misrepresent themselves, through fake profiles or non-transparent behaviours -- and **coordination**.

We consider authentic communications to be a central part of people's experience on Facebook. People find value in connecting with their friends and family, and they also find value in receiving updates from the Pages and organisations that they choose to follow. For this reason, authenticity has long been a requirement of our Community Standards. Specifically, our policies[8] prohibit people engaging in inauthentic behaviour, which includes creating, managing, or otherwise perpetuating accounts that are fake, accounts that have fake names, and accounts that participate in, or claim to engage in, CIB.[9]

CIB, as we define it, will be slightly broader than the strict interpretation of "foreign interference" as CIB may include inauthentic coordination by domestic actors, and it may include CIB that is financially motivated (for example, scams) rather than politically motivated. We take action on CIB according to the behaviour of the actors in the network, not the content they post.

However, the Committee's terms of reference also refer to phenomena broader than just foreign interference. We have provided information about Facebook's approach to the following separate but related policy concerns:

- **Disinformation.** Foreign interference is often used interchangeably with disinformation. This submission generally uses the term disinformation, although we acknowledge disinformation is a slightly broader term: disinformation is not necessarily limited to state actors, and may also be undertaken by non-state actors, domestic groups or commercial companies.

- **Misinformation.** There is often conflation between disinformation and misinformation. We see the difference as: disinformation is often synonymous with **behaviour**, while misinformation is synonymous with **content**. Misinformation refers to claims that are misleading or false, and it is necessary to identify misinformation through analysis of the content. Conversely, actors engaged in disinformation need not necessarily use misinformation; content shared by coordinated manipulation campaigns may not be provably false, and

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[8] Facebook, *Community Standards - Misrepresentation*, https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/misrepresentation/
[9] Facebook, *Community Standards - Misrepresentation*, https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/misrepresentation/; Facebook, C*oordinated Inauthentic Behavior Explained*, https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/12/inside-feed-coordinated-inauthentic-behavior/

would in fact be acceptable political discourse if it was shared by authentic actors. The real issue is that the actors behind these campaigns are using deceptive behaviours to conceal the identity of the organisation behind a campaign, make the organisation or its activity appear more popular or trustworthy than it is, or evade our enforcement efforts.

While there may be some overlap (actors engaged in disinformation may also utilise misinformation), disinformation and misinformation are not the same. This is the view of numerous experts in this space, such as Camille Francois[10] and First Draft[11].

Some experts define the difference between disinformation and misinformation as reliant on the **intention** of the publisher: that disinformation constitutes misleading information that is deliberately shared, and misinformation is the inadvertent sharing of misleading information. While we recognise many experts in the space hold this view, we believe the limitations in this distinction could be that: (1) for the purposes of governments or industry combatting disinformation / misinformation, the intention can be very difficult to discern; (2) this definition overlooks the fact that some bad actors pursue their own ends by using content that is not false (some examples of disinformation propagated through legitimate, benign content are available a Facebook announcement from March 2020[12]).

Given that the Committee's terms of reference have also referred to misinformation, we have provided information in our submission about Facebook's approach to combatting misinformation.

- **Foreign influence.** When foreign entities aim to affect the political debate within Australia but do so openly and transparently, this is better described as foreign influence (rather than foreign interference). Foreign actors can have a legitimate role in participating in Australian political debates. However, we recognise that there is value in providing transparency about the physical location of entities engaged in those debates on our services to give confidence about the role those entities play in the political process.

- **Electoral integrity.** Political debate is important at all times, but especially so in the lead-up to an election. Safeguarding electoral integrity involves combatting misinformation and disinformation, but it also involves upholding electoral laws and providing transparency around actors participating in Australian democratic processes.

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[10] C Francois, *Actors, Behavior, Content: A Disinformation ABC*, 20 September 2019, https://science.house.gov/imo/media/doc/Francois%20Addendum%20to%20Testimony%20-%20ABC_Framework_2019_Sept_2019.pdf

[11] H Derakhshan & C Wardle, 'Information Disorder: Definitions', *Understanding and Addressing the Disinformation Ecosystem*, December 2017, https://firstdraftnews.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/The-Disinformation-Ecosystem-20180207-v4.pdf?x42643

[12] N Gleicher, 'Removing Coordinated Inauthentic Behaviour from Russia', *Facebook Newsroom*, March 2020, https://about.fb.com/news/2020/03/removing-coordinated-inauthentic-behavior-from-russia/

The distinctions between each of these phenomena are important, because the policy concerns underlying each differ, and the most appropriate response from platforms like Facebook will also be different. For example, we believe the appropriate role we should play in relation to disinformation is different in relation to misinformation. We recommend the Committee clearly define and precise use any of the above terms in its final report.

We have provided information below about Facebook's efforts to address policy concerns in each of these areas: combatting CIB; addressing misinformation; enhancing transparency of foreign influence; and upholding electoral integrity. To assist the Committee, we have also provided suggestions about regulatory and legislative changes in Australia that could assist responding to these policy concerns.

Combatting coordinated inauthentic behaviour

As outlined earlier, given the central importance of authenticity to Facebook, CIB violates our Community Standards, and we regularly detect and remove networks of CIB.

We use a variety of techniques for detecting and acting on CIB:

- **Using automated technology.** We invested in sophisticated industry-leading technology, including artificial intelligence, to detect abuse like CIB.

  A good example of how we use technology relates to fake accounts: disinformation, misinformation or harmful content is often propagated online by fake accounts. Our detection technology helps us block millions of attempts to create fake accounts every day, and we detect millions more often within minutes after creation. We removed 1.5 billion fake accounts between April and June 2020, the majority of these accounts were caught within minutes of registration.[13] Of these, 99.6 per cent of these accounts were detected proactively via artificial intelligence, before they were reported to us. There has been a general decline since Q1 2019 in the volume of fake accounts we have been detecting, as our ability to detect and block attempts to create fake accounts at uphold has been improving.

- **Using people.** We have human investigators who work with technology to apply their own experience and knowledge to detect and assess possible networks of CIB. Across the company, we now have more than 35,000 people working on safety and security issues, including combatting abuse like CIB.

  In 2019, we announced the removal of more than 50 CIB networks globally. We are making progress in rooting out this abuse, but this is an ongoing effort. We're committed to continually improving to stay ahead.

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[13] Facebook, *Community Standards Enforcement Report*, https://transparency.facebook.com/community-standards-enforcement#fake-accounts

We report transparently on our efforts to address CIB and other forms of abuse through:

1. **Our Community Standards Enforcement Report.** Each quarter, we report on metrics on how we are doing at preventing and taking action on content that goes against our Community Standards on Facebook or Instagram. Our Community Standards are available at transparency.facebook.com/community-standards-enforcement

2. **Monthly CIB reports.** Earlier this year, we started publishing a list of the CIB networks taken down monthly. In some cases, we share information about the action taken at the time of enforcement. All reports and updates can be found at about.fb.com/news/tag/coordinated-inauthentic-behavior/

Finally, we also benefit from partnerships with organisations around the world who assist us in detecting and analysing CIB and other types of abuse, including in Australia.

Misinformation

Misinformation is also specifically named in the terms of reference for the Committee's inquiry.

We work hard to combat the spread of misinformation on Facebook and Instagram; this is a responsibility that we take seriously.

Facebook takes a significant number of steps to combat misinformation, especially in relation to misinformation on COVID-19. The steps we take fall under a three-part framework: remove; reduce; and inform.

Remove

We remove misinformation that violates our Community Standards and can cause imminent, physical harm. We have had a policy on Misinformation and Harm since 2018, and we work with experts to identify misinformation that can lead to imminent, physical harm. We have used this policy to remove, for example, harmful health misinformation during the measles outbreak in Samoa towards the end of 2019.

We have been applying the Misinformation and Harm policy since January 2020 to COVID-19, when we have been removing harmful claims, like drinking bleach cures the virus or that COVID-19 was caused by 5G. Between April and June this year, we removed 7 million posts for spreading harmful misinformation about COVID-19.

There is another category of misinformation we remove: "deepfakes" or misleading manipulated videos. After consulting with more than 50 global experts with technical, policy, media, legal, civic and academic backgrounds, we announced earlier this year that we will be removing manipulated media if: (1) it has been edited or synthesised –

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beyond adjustments for clarity or quality – in ways that aren't apparent to an average person and would likely mislead someone into thinking that a subject of the video said words that they did not actually say; and (2) it is the product of artificial intelligence or machine learning that merges, replaces or superimposes content onto a video, making it appear to be authentic.[14]

Reduce

For content that does not violate Community Standards, but still undermines the authenticity and integrity of the platform, we significantly reduce the number of people who see it. We do that by taking a number of steps:

• Firstly, we have commercial arrangements with independent third-party fact-checking organisations for them to review and rate the accuracy of posts on Facebook and Instagram. In Australia, we partner with Australian Associated Press and Agence France Presse, both certified by the non-partisan International Fact-Checking Network, as part of a network of over 70 fact-checking partners around the world. All fact-checks by these partners are publicly available on their websites.[15]
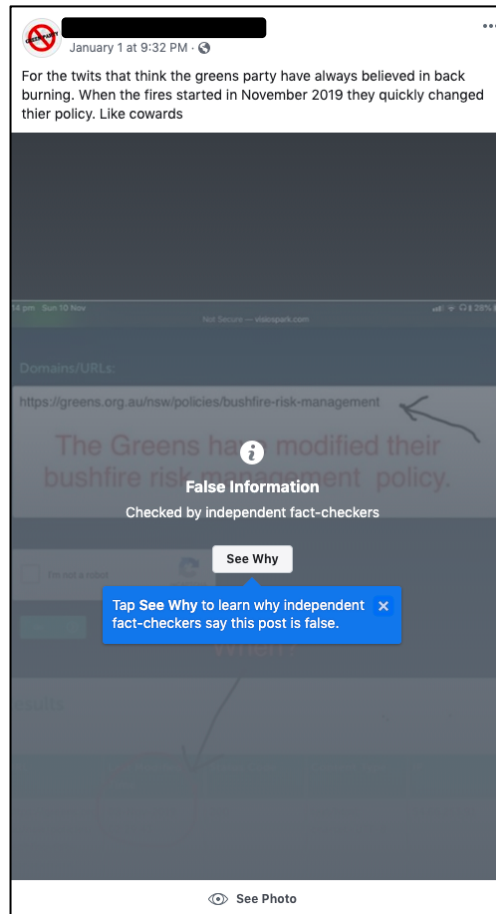
In addition to our existing commercial arrangements, we have given two $1 million grants to fact-checking partners to improve their capacity during the high-volume time associated with COVID-19, including in relation to misinformation on WhatsApp.

• Secondly, once a third-party fact-checking partner rates a post as 'false', we apply a warning label that indicates it is false and shows a debunking article from the fact checker. It is not possible to see the content without clicking past the warning label. When people see these warning labels, 95% of the time they do not go on to view the original content.

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[14] M Bickert, *Enforcing Against Manipulated Media*, https://about.fb.com/news/2020/01/enforcing-against-manipulated-media/, 6 January 2020.
[15] Agence France Presse Australia, *Fact Check*, https://factcheck.afp.com/afp-australia; Australian Association Presse, *AAP Fact Check*, https://www.aap.com.au/category/factcheck/

- Thirdly, we reduce the distribution of the content so it appears lower in News Feed, which slows its distribution significantly. Pages and domains that repeatedly share false news will also see reduced distribution of all their content and their ability to monetise and advertise removed.

- Fourthly, based on one fact-check, we're able to kick off similarity detection methods that identify duplicates of debunked stories. Using this technology, we are able to limit the distribution of similar posts: we have applied the label and reduced the distribution of more than 98 million posts worldwide, based on 7,500 fact-checks.
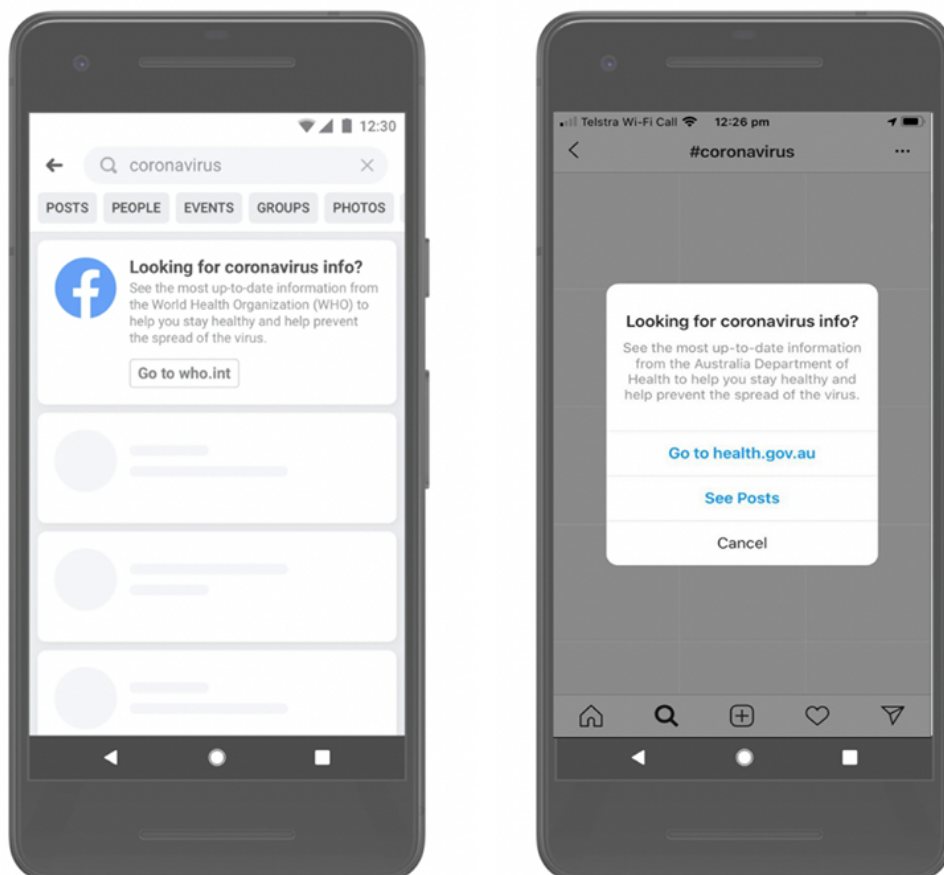
Inform

We inform people by giving them more context around the posts that they see in News Feed. In addition to the third-party fact-check and warning label we apply to fact-checked posts, we provide additional information in some of the following ways:

During COVID-19

Elevating authoritative information. As well as combatting misinformation, we consider it important to elevate authoritative sources of information relating to COVID-19 so more people see them. We have worked with the Australian Government to elevate authoritative information in multiple ways:

- Since the very beginning of the crisis, we have been displaying on Facebook and Instagram prompts to direct users to official sources of information, including from the Australian Government and the World Health Organization. These have been seen by every Facebook and Instagram user in Australia multiple times, either in their Feeds or when they search for coronavirus-related terms. In the last month, we ran prompts in Australia to urge people to wear a mask while outside at all times. Globally, we have connected 2 billion people with official information and 600 million people have clicked through to learn more.

- We have launched a Coronavirus Information Centre on Facebook in Australia that provides a centralised hub of latest updates, official Australian Government information, access to authoritative health resources, and curated news sources. We send regular alerts to those who are subscribed to the Coronavirus Information Centre so they are aware of this resource, and when people search for 'coronavirus' on our platform, they are directed to the WHO, Coronavirus Information Centre or the Australian Health Department.

  o Globally, we have also launched a Coronavirus Hub with authoritative information for information received on WhatsApp.[16]

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[16] WhatsApp, *WhatsApp Coronavirus Information Centre*, https://www.whatsapp.com/coronavirus/

- We have made significant donations of free advertising credits on Facebook's services to the Australian Government and state governments, to enable their advertising campaigns to reach even more Australians on our services.

- We worked with the Digital Transformation Agency, Atlassian and service provider Turn.io to launch a chatbot on WhatsApp to help people easily access the latest information.

  In May 2020, WhatsApp and Poynter Institute's International Fact-Checking Network also launched a fact checking Chatbot on WhatsApp. It was built as part of an ongoing effort to address the challenge of misinformation on online platforms, including hoaxes related to COVID-19. This was done in conjunctions with a $1m donation to International Fact-Checking Network for #CoronaVirus Facts Alliance. The bot connects WhatsApp users with independent fact-checkers in more than 70 countries, and a database of more than 4,000 debunked hoaxes related to the coronavirus.

  Across the globe, chatbots such as the Australian Government chatbot and the fact checking Chabot on WhatsApp have sent hundreds of millions of messages directly to people with official information and advice.

- We provided specific support for high-quality journalism, including a global $100 million to support the news industry which also involves funding for news organisations in Australia.[17] Newspapers such as the Central Coast Community News, Geelong Independent, Noosa Today, and Naracoorte News have all received grants to help contribute to the viability of these newsrooms throughout COVID-19.

Showing correct information after someone has seen harmful misinformation about COVID-19. We have started showing messages in News Feed to people who have liked, reacted or commented on harmful misinformation about COVID-19 that we have since removed. These messages will connect people to COVID-19 myths debunked by the WHO, including ones we've removed from our platform for leading to imminent physical harm.

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[17] The Walkley Foundation, '17 newsrooms in regional Australia secure financial support from the Facebook for Journalism Project COVID-19 News Relief Fund Program', *Walkley Foundation*, https://www.walkleys.com/facebook-fund-recipients-announced/, 15 July 2020.
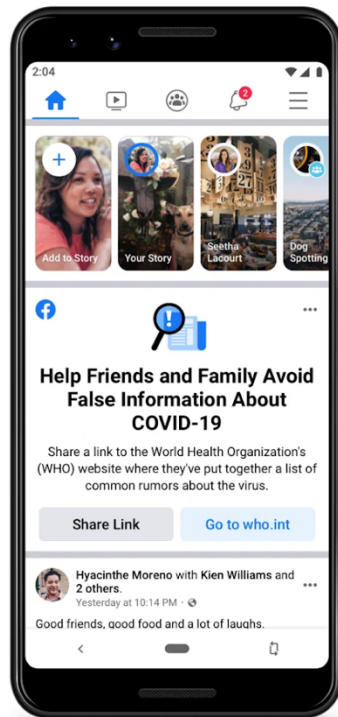
Providing people with additional context about information they share on COVID-19.
We have started rolling out a new notification to give people more context about
COVID-19 related links when they are about to share them. The notification will help
people understand the recency and source of the content before they share it. It will
also direct people to our COVID-19 Information Centre to ensure people have access
to credible information about COVID-19 from global health authorities.

Not specific to COVID-19

o **Providing more context around highly-forwarded messages.** While some
   messages are highly forwarded on WhatsApp because they are helpful,
   entertaining or meaningful, we have seen an increase in the amount of forwarding
   which users have told us can contribute to the spread of misinformation. Earlier
   this year, we announced new labels to indicate when you receive a message on
   WhatsApp that has been forwarded many times already. We also introduced a limit
   so a highly-forwarded message can only be sent to one chat at a time.[18] This
   resulted in a 70% reduction in the number of highly forwarded messages on
   WhatsApp.

   We implemented similar messaging forwarding limits on Messenger from
   September 2020.[19]

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[18] WhatsApp, 'Keeping WhatsApp Personal and Private', *WhatsApp*, https://blog.whatsapp.com/Keeping-WhatsApp-Personal-and-Private, 7 April 2020.
[19] J Sullivan, 'Messenger Launches Forwarding Limits', *Messenger News*, 3 September 2020.

And, we have announced that we're starting a global pilot with Google to trial a new "magnifying glass" icon next to highly-forwarded messages on WhatsApp to provide a simple way to find news results or other sources of information to double check the truthfulness of content users have received.[20]

o **Connecting users with accurate information about vaccines.** We are taking a range of steps to make anti-vaccination misinformation harder to find and to elevate authoritative information about vaccines, including:

- Removing Groups and Pages that spread vaccine misinformation from recommendations or predictions when you type into Search
- Rejecting ads and fundraisers that include anti-vaccination misinformation once we find them. For ad accounts that continue to violate our policies, we may take further action, such as disabling the ad account.
- Inserting authoritative notices at the top of Groups and Pages that are discussing anti-vax misinformation, directing people to authoritative sources (see two examples below).
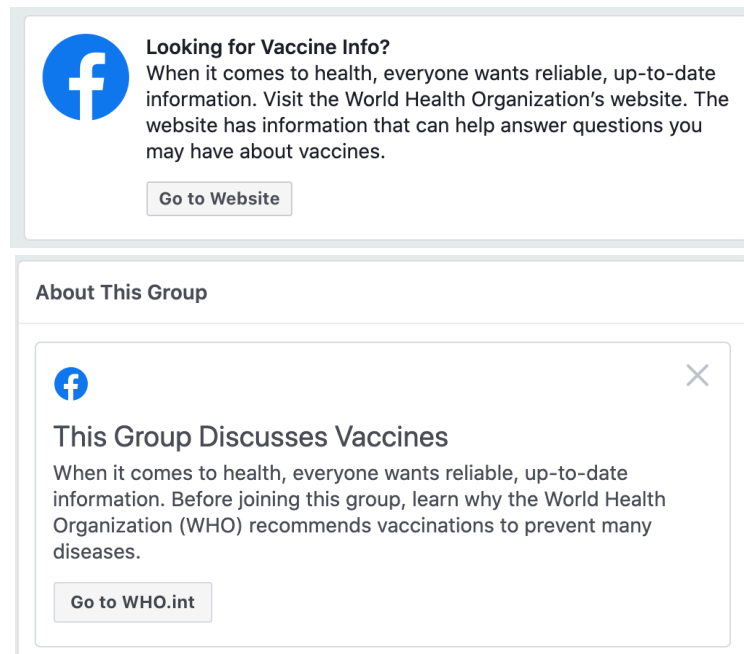
Providing labelling and other signals to users about the trustworthiness of information. We have developed a number of other labels and signals for users relating to the trustworthiness of information they see on Facebook. These include:

o the context button, which provides information about the sources of articles in News Feed[21],

o the breaking news tag, to help people easily identify timely news or urgent stories,

o and new labels for content from media outlets that are partly or fully under the control of their government.[22]

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[20] WhatsApp, 'Search the Web', *WhatsApp*, https://blog.whatsapp.com/search-the-web, 3 August 2020.

[21] J Smith, A Leavitt & G Jackson, 'Designing New Ways to Give Context to Stories', *Facebook Newsroom*, https://about.fb.com/news/2018/04/inside-feed-article-context/, 8 April 2018

[22] N Gleicher, 'Labeling State-Controlled Media', *Facebook Newsroom*, https://about.fb.com/news/2020/06/labeling-state-controlled-media/, 4 June 2020.

Undertaking research. We are also undertaking a number of pieces of research to understand the phenomenon of misinformation. This includes:

- Research relating to media literacy, conducted with Australian academics as part of a larger international consortium led by the US National Association for Media Literacy Education.
- We have invested US$2 million in a global round of funding for academic research on misinformation and polarisation. We announced the winners in August 2020, two of whom came from Australian universities.[23]
- Research by an Australian academic to map government approaches to combatting misinformation around the world, focussing on the Asia-Pacific region.

Combatting misinformation is a highly challenging and adversarial space, so we still miss things and won't catch everything -- but we're making progress.

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[23] A Leavitt, K Grant, 'Announcing the winners of Facebook's request for proposals on misinformation and polarization', https://research.fb.com/blog/2020/08/announcing-the-winners-of-facebooks-request-for-proposals-on-misinformation-and-polarization/, 7 August 2020.

Transparency of foreign influence

Although foreign influence is not the same as foreign interference, we support authenticity and providing transparency about the use of our services for political purposes, including by foreign actors.

We have increased transparency in a number of ways:

- Instituting a greater level of transparency to Facebook Pages.[24] Under the Transparency tab of Pages, users are able to see the location of Page admins, the history of a Page, and ads currently running.

- Establishing an Ad Library[25] to make it easier to learn about all ads on Facebook and the Pages that run them. The Ad Library includes all active ads any Page is running, along with more Page information such as creation date, name changes, Page merges and the primary country of people who manage Pages with large audiences. The information is now available to everyone through the Ad Library, including people who aren't on Facebook.

  As of August 2020, we apply even-stricter requirements to political ads.[26] Anyone who wants to run a political ad needs to provide identification and be authorised by Facebook prior to running the ad. And political ads are mandated to remain archived in the Ad Library for up to seven years after they have run.

- Applying labels to content from media outlets that are partly or fully under the control of their government. We provide greater transparency into these publishers because they combine the influence of a media organisation with the strategic backing of a state, and we believe people should know if the news they read is coming from a publication that may be under the influence of a government.[27]

The steps we have taken bring an unprecedented level of transparency to political advertising in Australia. Shining a brighter light on advertising and Pages makes both Facebook and advertisers more accountable, which is good for people and good for democracy.

In some instances, we have also limited the possibility of undue foreign influence in politics. For example, we temporarily restricted political or electoral ads purchased from outside Australia in April and May 2019 ahead of the Australian Federal

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[24] Facebook, A New Level of Transparency for Ads and Pages, https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/06/transparency-for-ads-and-pages/
[25] Facebook, A New Level of Transparency for Ads and Pages, https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/06/transparency-for-ads-and-pages/
[26] We define political ads as advertisements: (1) made by, on behalf of, or about a candidate for public office, a political figure, a political party or advocates for the outcome of an election to public office; or (2) about any election, referendum or ballot initiative, including "go out and vote" or election campaigns.
[27] N Gleicher, 'Labeling State-Controlled Media', *Facebook Newsroom*, https://about.fb.com/news/2020/06/labeling-state-controlled-media/, 4 June 2020.

Election.[28] The restriction took effect the day after the election was called and applied to ads we determined to be coming from foreign entities that were of an electoral nature, meaning they contained references to politicians, parties or election suppression. As part of this ban, we did not allow foreign ads that include political slogans and party logos.

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[28] M Garlick, 'Working to Safeguard Elections in Australia, *Facebook Newsroom*, https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2019/04/safeguard-elections-in-australia/, 4 April 2019.

Upholding electoral laws and electoral integrity

On our services, Australians connect and share with the people that matter to them and engage about the issues they care about, which may include politics. To provide confidence that we are playing our part to safeguard the integrity of elections, we take the following steps to uphold electoral integrity (in addition to the measures outlined in other sections):

- **Combatting voter suppression.** Under our policies, we prohibit offers to buy or sell votes with cash or gifts, as well as misrepresentation of the dates, locations, times, and methods voting or voter registration (for example: claims that you can vote using an online app), misrepresentations of who can vote, how to vote, qualifications for voting and whether a vote will be counted. We also do not allow statements that advocate, provide instructions, or show explicit intent to illegally participate in a voting process.

- **Working with Australian electoral authorities.** As part of our specific focus on the 2019 Australian election, we established a productive working relationship with members of the Government's election integrity taskforce, including:

  - The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC)
  - The National Counter Foreign Interference Coordinator
  - The Department of Home Affairs
  - The Department of Communications and the Arts.

  The agencies on the taskforce (and other government agencies) were able to escalate any concerns with us throughout the election campaign. An even-closer working relationship was put in place with the AEC: we agreed in advance a protocol with the AEC that allowed a rapid escalation channel for any concerns throughout the campaign. We worked closely to quickly respond to all issues raised with us by Australian Government agencies.

  We also work closely with state and territory electoral commissions to establish similar referral arrangements before elections in their states and territories.

Regulation of foreign interference and influence

We understand the Committee may be interested in what steps the Australian Government can take to lift efforts to combat foreign interference and influence.

We concur with the comments made by a group of international experts (in relation to the COVID-19 disinformation) that: "it is essential that governments and internet companies address disinformation in the first instance by themselves providing reliable information… Resorting to other measures, such as content take-downs and censorship, may result in limiting access to important information for public health

and should only be undertaken where they meet the standards of necessity and proportionality."[29]

We also believe there are greater steps the Australian Government could take to engage in information-sharing with digital platforms and industry more broadly about foreign interference or influence operations.

We have also been strong supporters - and drivers - of an Australian voluntary industry code related to disinformation, inspired by the EU Disinformation Code of Practice. We look forward to providing an update on those industry discussions in due course.

Finally, consistent with our CEO's call for new regulation around election integrity[30], we support a review to strengthen Australian electoral laws to require greater transparency around political advertising.

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[29] UN Human Rights Office of the high Commissioner, 'COVID-19: Governments must promote and protect access to and free flow of information during the pandemic - international experts', *OHCHR News and Events*, https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25729, 19 March 2020.
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