

Attachment—Additional Questions for the Record

**Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Hearing on
“Holding Big Tech Accountable: Targeted Reforms to Tech’s Legal Immunity”
December 1, 2021**

Ms. Frances Haugen, Former Facebook Employee

The Honorable Tony Cárdenas (D-CA)¹

1. Ms. Haugen, according to your testimony before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Data Security, you stated that in regards to Facebook’s allocation of integrity spending, “87 percent of all the misinformation spending is spent on English, but only about 9 percent of the users are English speakers.” Additionally, you testified that Facebook’s internal documents “showed a consistent pattern of under investment in languages that are not English.” To the best of your knowledge, could you please clarify how much of Facebook’s allocation on integrity spending is focused specifically on Spanish-language content and disinformation? And why does the lack of spending matter?

RESPONSE:

Under-investment in misinformation spending is dramatically worse in Spanish, worse even than Facebook’s under-investment in English misinformation resources. We see this in the lopsided resource allocations for operational expenses for fighting misinformation: 87% of the spending is for English speaking users, and only 13% is for the rest of the world - that 13% for “rest of world” includes Spanish, but Spanish would only be a fraction of that 13%. I don’t know the exact population numbers, but obviously there are less English-speaking users than in the rest of the world.

This means that Spanish-speaking users have a more toxic Facebook experience, filled with more misinformation than the rest of the U.S. public. Note also that because Spanish-speaking communities are a critical growth area for these platforms -- and since we know misinformation travels faster than good information online (and has higher “MSI” [Meaningful Social Interaction] score as a result) -- Facebook has a powerful incentive to let misinformation travel like wildfire, lighting up more chances to advertise to us and fill its coffers, but

¹ <https://thehill.com/policy/technology/565637-democrats-urge-tech-ceos-to-combat-spanish-disinformation>
<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2021/mar/16/facebook-spanish-language-disinformation-congress>

harming Latino communities in the process. The only way this will get better is if policymakers who care about Latino communities stand up and demand something different.

One last Spanish-specific concern is the sensitivity of AI systems to differences in dialects. Repeatedly in my disclosures Facebook documented challenges treating diverse language families as homogenous languages (ex. Arabic is multiple only partially overlapping language families, not a perfectly uniform singular language spoken by 1B people. (This means far less violating content is caught in some arabic dialects than others).

Spanish, while less diverse than Arabic in its dialects, nevertheless has many subtleties in how it is spelled/spoken throughout the Spanish-speaking world. AI, as implemented by Facebook, is brittle in how it performs in different dialects. I would be unsurprised if there were large gaps in the performance of Facebook's Spanish language safety systems between Mexican-Spanish vs various South-American dialects vs Spain-Spanish because of underinvestment by Facebook.

Facebook's focus on content detection/content take downs instead of designing the system for safety via simple content-neutral actions (like requiring a click before resharing a link) will always leave behind non-English speakers because Facebook's safety strategy does not scale to a linguistically diverse world.

2. During your testimony you spoke about how personalized algorithms pick up on users' vulnerabilities and use that information to amplify and exacerbate harmful content meant to keep the user engaged. What reforms to Facebook and other platforms' algorithms do you recommend in regards to personalized content?

RESPONSE:

In my opinion, there will be no way to fix Facebook's algorithms until they are forced to be significantly more transparent than they are today. Facebook must be required to publish sufficient data about the performance of its systems in order to enable external parties, including oversight and regulatory bodies, to hold it accountable. Until that happens, any fixes or promises Facebook makes with regard to addressing concerns are meaningless, given that they've been hiding the ball and breaking promises to regulators year after year. There are numerous algorithmic changes that can provide a safer, more healthy Facebook experience for users, many of which are documented in my disclosures. However, without transparency it seems a futile exercise to accept any assurances that much-needed change will be implemented. The only thing that will keep the public safe is an ongoing feedback loop of transparency and accountability.

3. Do you believe that social media platforms should have Section 230 immunity when they *knowingly* amplify harmful content?

RESPONSE:

I am not a legal expert on liability. But I see Facebook choosing not to deploy content-neutral solutions that could reduce violent and extreme content, consistently optimizing for profit and growth over safety. They are the algorithmic author of who sees what content, and they alone make those authorial choices because it is more profitable that way. It seems like they should be held accountable for these choices.

4. Do you believe that H.R. 5596, *Justice Against Malicious Algorithms Act of 2021*, addresses the problem relating to personalized algorithms?

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/5596/text>

RESPONSE:

I am not a lawyer and unfortunately do not have the expertise and context necessary to offer opinions on legislative proposals. However, I appreciate your earnest engagement in these important and difficult questions of law and policy, and look forward to being a technical resource as often as I am able.

5. Ms. Haugen, we have seen how Facebook tries to shift accountability about content moderation between their oversight board and leadership at Facebook. Who is the person or entity that has the final word on how to oversee and handle disinformation at Facebook? How can that person or entity be held responsible?

RESPONSE:

For years Facebook has tried to focus our attention on content moderation to distract us from the main problem – how engagement based ranking and Facebook’s over reliance on large groups hyper-amplifies disinformation. Right now the only person who has the final word on how disinformation is handled at Facebook is Mark Zuckerberg. The Oversight board only addresses policies regarding how individual pieces of content were judged. They do not oversee the fundamental problems with Facebook, like algorithms, that give the most reach to the most extreme ideas, product features that enable the most active users of Facebook to dominate the information environment and the intrinsic problems of lack of oversight or transparency of the company overall.

Facebook knows how to make the platform safer, and it is my opinion that part of what prevents them from acting is that many of the solutions require the resolution of conflicts between different teams with different goals. The only

person who can make the hypothetical judgment call of “reducing disinformation by 75% is worth a one time cost of a sliver of profit” is Mark Zuckerberg, because any such conflict would ultimately be escalated to him.

6. Mark Zuckerberg is the CEO of Facebook and Chairman of the Board. Shouldn't Mr. Zuckerberg be held accountable?

RESPONSE:

This seems correct. Mark Zuckerberg holds a majority of the voting shares of Facebook, and in the end he is the only one accountable for the actions of Facebook. Very few people in the world (or in history) wield as much unilateral control as Mr. Zuckerberg does; he is unchecked by corporate governance, and unchecked by regulators. The fact Facebook can cut a \$5 billion check to the FTC for illegal behavior and write the fine off as the cost of doing business makes a mockery of the idea that the laws of the United States govern Facebook. Mr.

Zuckerberg made a decision to pivot the company to focus on video games (The Metaverse) in the wake of widespread concerns instigated by my disclosures about Facebook misleading the public and its shareholders about the harms to kids, human trafficking, enablement of cartels and terrorism, amplifying ethnic hate and violence, hyper-amplifying misinformation and more. Rather than focusing on those critical and world changing problems directly impacted by the corporation he controls demonstrates a critical lack of leadership that is unacceptable. We don't accept unilateral control of any comparable system, and Mr. Zuckerberg has not earned his right to unilateral control over such a powerful piece of infrastructure across the United States and the world at large. We are paying the costs of Mark Zuckerberg's inaction in the polarization, division and growing extremism within our society - and that will continue until we take external action.

7. As a matter of simple transparency, do you believe there should be a requirement that the largest social media platforms disclose the specific algorithms they employ on their platforms? Think of it as an online labeling requirement that provides a plain English explanation and rationale for the purpose of each algorithm, and the content and users most likely to be impacted.

RESPONSE:

With regards to the rights of users, I strongly support the rights of Facebook and Instagram users to be able to understand why and how they are shown individual pieces of content. Providing this data would allow researchers to study what and how Facebook prioritizes, which is essential for accountability. In addition to a plain English explanation for why a user is shown content, Facebook should also

have to disclose numerical parameters that explain why content is shown. If this is not included, Facebook may obfuscate how they operate under the excuse that they had to simplify it in order to make it a plain English explanation.

There are multiple documents within my disclosure that discuss that Facebook is currently unable to deploy some of their safety strategies effectively (ex. demoting violating content) for content at the top of the News Feed due to technical debt. This is unacceptable. In a world where Facebook had to redesign its algorithms such that it was possible to articulate why individual pieces of content were shown to users, it would provide an opportunity to have algorithms that were designed from the ground up in a way that could actually execute on the safety strategies they present to the public and make it easier for Facebook employees to keep the public safe.