

FACEBOOK

**Submission to the Future of Media
Commission**

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Facebook Ireland Limited welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Future of Media Commission's consultation. We note that the scope of commission's work includes public service broadcasters, commercial broadcasters, print and online media platforms. For the purposes of this submission, we will refer to these collectively as "media organisations"

This submission is divided into four parts; an overview of the existing products, tools and services that are made available by Facebook to journalists and media organisations; innovation and collaboration with journalists and media organisations; our approach to misinformation; and media literacy.

Facebook is committed to supporting media organisations, and in particular news organisations, as they adapt to the changing digital world. We hope that the members of the Commission find the information below of benefit to their work in formulating recommendations as to how media organisations in Ireland can address the challenges which they face, and we would be more than happy to provide further information or expand on any of the points below at any time.

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 media organisations 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, such as misinformation, which we will address in detail below.

The internet is not the first technology to spark a paradigm shift in the media industry. The introduction of radio, television, and then satellite and cable 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 media organisations.

Our existing products, tools and services

Despite the trend towards the digital consumption of news, news media is still only a very small part of the content on Facebook. Having said that, 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 enables media organisations 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 organisations to become established and to flourish around the world, including in Ireland.

Media organisations may choose to establish a free Facebook Page for their publication or service - 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, they choose what content they would like to make available on Facebook. Media organisations may distribute their articles for free by posting them to their Page, or by making them Instant Articles (see further information below). Using the Facebook Page, the organisation can also post other types of written content, photos, or videos, schedule events, and provide information about itself - all for free.

Facebook directs traffic away from our platform and onto news websites and the media organisation 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 media organisation’s Page, which will make posts by that organisation more likely to appear in a person’s News Feed. *RTÉ News*, for example, has a [Facebook Page](https://www.facebook.com/rtenews/)¹ that is liked by more than 716,000

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/rtenews/>

people. These people are more likely to see content from *RTÉ News* in their News Feed than people who have not liked or followed the Page.

We publish regular updates to our News Feed FYI blog² 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.

There is a common misconception that Facebook takes content from news organisations, this is simply not the case. News content appears on Facebook either because

- a. the organisations themselves put it there, making use of the tools and services we provide, or
- b. links to the content are shared by users.

Users sharing news content

Many media organisations encourage the sharing of their content by placing share buttons on their websites, and this is how the vast majority of news appears on our platforms. While news media can also be shared by a person using Facebook by copying and posting a link, this represents only a small amount of the news content on the platform. However, if someone does click on the link, they will either be taken to the organisation's website or, if the organisation 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 media organisation retains control over access to the content. If the organisation 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 view the content on the publisher's site.

Instant Articles

Instant Articles³ 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.

² <https://about.fb.com/news/category/news-feed-fyi/>

³ <https://www.facebook.com/journalismproject/facebook-instant-articles-improved-performance-2020>

Instant Articles give media organisations the ability to sell their own ads, drive newsletter sign-ups, and monitor and track their traffic. If a media organisation sells the ad itself, then it retains all of the associated revenue. If the organisation relies on us to back fill the ads through the Facebook Audience Network, then we and the organisation each earn a share of the resulting ad revenue.

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

Use of services by journalists

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.

Innovation and Collaboration

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 media organisations and journalists, these changes have created challenges and uncertainties, as well as opportunities.

Our News Partnerships Team works with media organisations in Ireland to assist them in achieving their objectives on Facebook and to collaborate on relevant product development, so that they 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](#)⁴ 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.

On 9 April 2020, 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](#)

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/journalismproject/home>

Support Fund⁵ to help journalists in Europe cover important stories when we all need them most. EJC is directing 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. Two Irish media organisations, the Bere Island Project Group and the Dublin Inquirer, secured grants via this funding⁶.

In addition, 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. In December 2019 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 has since been recognised with a Webby award.

Monetising content on Facebook

We help media organisations of all sizes build and maintain their businesses. We provide tools to support 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 media organisations 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 media organisations a variety of ways to monetise their content on Facebook:

- They can serve all their own advertising in Instant Articles and receive 100% of the revenue and control pricing for other features.
- They can implement a payment wall. Paywalls give control over access to content and provide a mechanism to convert readers to paid subscribers.
- They can use a variety of advertising tools, including subscription calls to action, to drive subscriptions.
- They 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.

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/journalismproject/programs/grants/coronavirus-european-news-support-fund>

⁶ [https://europeanjournalism.fund/grantees/organisations?fields\[granteeCountry\]=ireland](https://europeanjournalism.fund/grantees/organisations?fields[granteeCountry]=ireland)

- They can take advantage of industry-specific tools we have created for them. For example, Branded Content allows publishers and media organisations to extend their brand deals to Facebook.

An example of our work to help media organisations 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,

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.

Facebook News

Last November, we also announced that Facebook News would launch in January 2021 in the UK. Facebook News is a dedicated space for national and local news, where we will pay publishers for content that is not already on the platform, help publishers reach new audiences and bring more advertising and subscription opportunities.

Facebook News offers a mix of curated and personalised top stories to deliver informative, reliable and relevant news. Readers see the top headlines and stories of the day alongside news personalised to their interests. During major news cycles, Facebook News provides timely news digests, highlighting original and authoritative reporting on pressing topics. Facebook News also helps people discover new topics and stories based on the news they read, share and follow.

The UK launch in January will build on the success Facebook News has seen in the US, where we've found more than 95% of the traffic Facebook News delivers to publishers is new audiences that have not interacted with those news outlets in the past.

We're in active negotiations to bring Facebook News to France and Germany as well, and we will continue to work with publishers in countries where market conditions and regulatory environments invite this kind of investment and innovation.

Tackling Misinformation

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. 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.

We recognise that misinformation presents a threat 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 80 fact-checking organisations in more than 60 languages to help us tackle misinformation. In Ireland, our partners are thejournal.ie. 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 the 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.

Misinformation has been one of the key emerging harms during the COVID-19 crisis. Between March and October 2020, globally we removed 12 million pieces of content from Facebook and Instagram for containing misinformation that may lead to imminent physical harm. During the same period, we displayed warnings on close to 167 million pieces of content on Facebook based on Covid-19 related debunking articles written by our third party fact checking partners.

During the month of April 2020 alone, 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. When people saw those warning labels, 95% of the time they did not click to view the original content.

One of Facebook's key priorities during the COVID-19 pandemic has been providing users with access to accurate and authoritative information. In Ireland, we have been working with the HSE since the first case of COVID-19 was detected

here. We have done this by amplifying the HSE's and the Government's public health messaging: directing our users to the HSE's COVID-19 website and providing the HSE and the Government Information Service with free ads. In the first month of the COVID-19 outbreak, the prompts in Facebook News Feed resulted in over 204,000 visitors to the HSE website.

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

Media Literacy

Facebook wants to give people the tools to make informed decisions about the information they see online and where it comes from. To support this effort, we conducted a campaign across the EU throughout July and August 2020 to educate and inform people about how to detect potential false news. In consultation with some of our fact-checking partners, we developed 'Three Questions to Help Stamp out False News', which appeared on Facebook adverts directing people to a dedicated website with a full set of tips – www.stampoutfalsenews.com. These adverts asked people to challenge the information they see on posts.

In Ireland, the media literacy campaign reached 1.7 million users.

In 2019 the Facebook Journalism Project and Reuters launched an e-learning course. The course: Identify and tackle Manipulated Media aims to help newsrooms around the world equip themselves to identify manipulated media. The course is now available in 16 languages.

Facebook is also a proud member of Media Literacy Ireland (MLI) which brings together organisations from all sectors with the common aim of advancing media literacy in Ireland. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Facebook supported MLI's 'Be Media Smart' campaign by issuing free ads to MLI's members in the not-for-profit sector so that they could promote this important campaign among their own communities. The campaign encouraged the public to 'stop, think and check' the news they consume. The campaign directed users to a website where they could find helpful tips and resources – www.bemediasmart.ie.

Conclusion

In this submission we have set out the existing products, tools and services that are available to journalists and media organization; how we collaborate with media organisations and support innovation in this space; our approach to tackling misinformation; and our support for Media Literacy in Ireland.

We are grateful for the opportunity to participate in this process, and we would be more than happy to elaborate on any of the topics discussed above, or provide

further information to the members of the Commission to assist them in their work.

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