

Media@LSE MSc Dissertation Series

Editors: Bart Cammaerts and Lisa Derand



Building a Social Contract for the Network Society

A Discursive Study of How Meta Mediates its Relationship to
Users and Society Through Public Policy Communications

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Published by Media@LSE, London School of Economics and Political Science ("LSE"), Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE. The LSE is a School of the University of London. It is a Charity and is incorporated in England as a company limited by guarantee under the Companies Act (Reg number 70527).

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ABSTRACT

Although much is written about the impact of social media on everything from users to businesses to governments, the question of how these corporations approach their relationship with society is often left unexamined. In working to fill that gap in the literature, this paper looks to understand how Meta, Inc., one of the world's largest internet conglomerates, comprehends its distinct market positionality and constructs its relationship with users and society. Employing a mixed-methods approach using the computer-assisted text analysis software Sketch Engine and Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis technique, this research examines a curated corpus of 471 Meta policy publications over the five-year period from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2021 and a curated sub-corpus of 4 executive communications. In doing so, the analysis finds that, understood via the framework of a social contract, Meta promotes itself as a responsible arbiter of the public interest, speaks directly to governments and regulatory authorities while doing so, and sets out limits for the company's obligations in handling platform issues. The paper concludes that, given these findings, Meta's public policy communications articulate a distinct corporate desire to limit external regulatory interference in its business.

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INTRODUCTION

Often the subject of criticism, Meta, Inc. (“Meta”) is one of the world’s most powerful and influential corporations. Across its platforms¹ of Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, the company hosts billions of users, supports the livelihoods of millions of small businesses, and catalyzes collective action (Statista, 2022; Wolfsfeld et al., 2013). Moreover, Meta’s dominance within the social media sector is such that its business and policy decisions reverberate through the industry. Although governments had long abdicated responsibility for protecting fundamental human rights and democratic principles to the platforms themselves, that is starting to change. Confronted with the spectre of regulatory intervention, Meta now finds itself in the crosshairs of policymakers across the world.

One of the reasons for this is that there is a growing public consensus around how Meta’s policy decisions impact the welfare of both users and society. In the company’s mission statement, Meta professes a desire to “give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together” (Meta, n.d.). However, in doing so, its platforms also enable significant harm. From misinformation campaigns to online harms and breaches of privacy, the impact from activities on Meta’s platforms are not solely positive. One of the most prominent examples of this is Meta’s actions during the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election. In that contest, Facebook hosted a significant degree of misinformation and “fake news” (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017: 221–223; Guess *et al.*, 2020: 3–6), and was heavily criticized for the *Cambridge Analytica* scandal involving the abuse of consumer data and platform ad services for political gain (Hern, 2018; Madrigal, 2017). Although subsequent policy decisions have improved Meta’s ability to mitigate these issues, the company’s response here highlights an important

¹ Note: While the definition of “platform” remains a fruitful area of debate in media governance studies, this study uses José van Dijck’s definition that an “online ‘platform’ is a programmable digital architecture designed to organize interactions between users—not just end users but also corporate entities and public bodies. It is geared toward the systematic collection, algorithmic processing, circulation, and monetization of user data” (van Dijck *et al.*, 2018: 4).

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tension in its approach to platform policy; one that pits the company's professed desire to create social good against its technical capabilities and corporate/economic interests.

Taking a step back, Meta's size and ad-based economic model present enormous challenges for policymaking on its platforms. Meta is a \$594.36 billion² conglomerate with 2.87 billion daily active users in nearly every market on the planet (Statista, 2022). Even with recent advances in Automated Intelligence and Machine Learning, ensuring the welfare of users and society is a difficult proposition (Scheck *et al.*, 2021). This is made even more complex because, according to Meta whistleblower Francis Haugen, while "no one at Facebook is malevolent," the company regularly prioritizes engagement over all else (Paul & Milmo, 2021). Because Meta's ad-based funding model relies on the overall breadth and specificity of targeting that Meta can provide to its business clients, more engagement means more revenue. This creates a tension between platform funding and concerns for the "public good" (Hagey & Horwitz, 2021). While some activities on social media platforms negatively impact user/societal wellbeing, their virality can sometimes create economic benefits for the platform.³

This creates a daunting challenge for Meta's day-to-day operations. While governments had once left the question of fundamental rights and democratic principles online to private platforms, regulation in this space is becoming more and more common. For its part, Meta openly straddles the question of regulation. In alternating turns, the company pushes both aggressive lobbying efforts against regulation (Cadwalladr & Campbell, 2019; Corporate Europe Observatory Staff, 2022; Kayali, 2019) and impassioned calls for regulatory action (Newcomer *et al.*, 2019; Zuckerberg, 2020). Although these actions appear contradictory, this paper argues that they can be understood as part of a coherent strategy evident within Meta's policy discourse. That is, by elevating the company's capabilities and publicly recognizing its responsibility to users and society, Meta communicates the framework of a social contract for

² As of February 2022

³ Although Meta denies this (Clegg, 2020), numerous leaks and studies have suggested otherwise (Hern, 2020; Munn, 2020; Sadowski, 2019).

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the network society. It uses that framework to justify its push for limiting governmental intervention in its business activities.

This is rooted in relational trust. How Meta constructs that trust is the topic of study here. As governments continue to develop regulation under pressure from Meta and its peers, understanding the company's motives for promoting or resisting certain policies impacting users and society remains critical for ensuring their eventual efficacy. The best way to do this is through Meta's own words; using discursive analysis to move past the performativity of corporate communications to understand underlying intent. To that end, this study applies a mixed-methods qualitative analysis technique to 471 policy documents and 4 executive communications between 1 January 2017 and 31 December 2021. This enables the study to look at the company from both a macro- and micro-scale perspective to develop a comprehensive understanding of Meta's policy discourse.

This paper begins with an overview of social contract theory and the utility of this approach as a framework for understanding platform obligations to society. Next, that framework is expanded to provide further context from platform studies (re: the social/economic power of online platforms), and critical discourse studies (re: policy as a form of discourse). Following the literature review, the paper then outlines the study's methodology, the results provided via empirical analysis, and an evaluation of research findings. Finally, the paper provides a conclusion based on an extension of the findings, a discussion of limitations and recommendations for future research.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Social Contract Approach

This research project examines the relationship between diametrically opposed groups in the network society. On one side is Meta Platforms, Inc., a powerful multinational conglomerate that extracts vast amounts of capital from users in the form of data. On the other are the users

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themselves and the civil society institutions that not only desire to protect their interests but often have the power to regulate how Meta conducts its business (van Dijck *et al.*, 2018: 137–139). This relationship is naturally tenuous, but the way Meta understands and frames its approach to users and society has enormous implications for its overall business strategy.

Using the terminology by Prof. Tarleton Gillespie, Meta (and platforms like Meta) are “Custodians of the Internet;” companies whose services require them to take on the burden of protecting both users and society from abuse through moderation, privacy protections, and other policy decisions (Gillespie, 2018). But policy decisions to protect users and society are expensive. From a financial/human perspective (Schoolov, 2021), from a lost revenue perspective (Yildirim *et al.*, 2022), and from a reputational perspective (de Chant, 2021), working to combat online harms is a difficult, but necessary step for Meta’s business. It is also a step that will likely never be perfect—or free from criticism. This results in a tug-of-war between the steps that platforms *do* take, and the steps that users and society believe they *ought* to take. Meta’s efforts to resolve these competing priorities are what the company voices through its policy communications.

Analyzing those efforts requires a fixed approach. By working to balance interests, Meta constructs a de-facto relationship with its users and society; one in which each gives up certain liberties in return for the benefits of access to the other. For Meta, this means investing in moderation, privacy protection, and other platform systems in return for access to data and users. For users and society, this entails giving up sovereignty over data and social discourse in return for access to Meta’s platforms and services. Because of the bidirectional reality of this relationship and the implications for both parties involved, this research puts forward the framework of a social contract; a framework rooted in political philosophy, yet uniquely qualified as an approach to understanding how Meta works to build and maintain its relationship with users and society. Although other frames were considered, including privacy law, public discourse theory, public relations, and power, social contract theory was chosen because of its basis in long-standing principles that govern power relations within

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democratic states.⁴ Not only does it present an ideal for these relationships, but it also provides an understanding of power that shapes the environments in which Meta operates.

At a high level, social contract theory finds its basis in the political writings of philosophers such as John Locke (1689), Jean Jacques Rousseau (1762), and John Rawls (1971, 2001).⁵ Although separated by centuries, each of these contributions to social contract theory represents an attempt to construct an understanding of the political society at their time; Locke during England's 'Glorious Revolution,' Rousseau during a heightened period of civil discontent with the French monarchy, and Rawls in late-20th Century America. Notably, despite their differences, each of these writers presupposes that Man (in the traditional sense), simply by nature of being a member of political society, gives up certain fundamental rights to receive the benefits of society and its institutions (Locke, 1689: secs. 124–126; Rawls, 2001: 42–43; Rousseau, 1762: 145). This is the essence of the social contract; the provision of fundamental liberties to authority in exchange for 'equal basic liberties,' to use Rawlsian terminology. It is an articulation of power within the state; the balancing of responsibility and power between those who rule and those who are ruled.

While powerful, transposing this corpus of theory to platform studies was initially unclear. After all, Meta and its platforms are not nation-states, much less the nation-states of 17th Century England or 18th Century France. For providing a bridge between theory and practice, this study is indebted to Victor Pickard's essay, *A Social Contract for Platforms* (Pickard, 2021). In that essay, Pickard utilizes the social contract as a framework in much the same manner intended in this project. For Pickard, the social contract explains how, based on history, good

4 E.g. Privacy Law: (Peyton, 2020; Prosser, 1960; Warren & Brandeis, 1980), Public Discourse Theory: (Dahlberg, 2014; Dahlgren, 2005; Habermas et al., 1992; Papacharissi, 2014), Public Relations: (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Balmer, 2001; Balmer & Wilson, 1998; Bromley, 1993; Gioia, 1998), Power: (Bourdieu, 1991; Castells, 2013b; Foucault, 1977, 1991)

5 Notably, Thomas Hobbes (1651) is excluded from this list. Although the 'social contract' in this approach is as a framework, the choice of contributing scholars here reflects one branch of how this theory has developed over time. That is, these scholars promote that there are some fundamental rights of individuals that limit the power of the sovereign, giving their relationship a more balanced nature (in gross simplification). For examples of applied Hobbesian theory in the media policy space (even if not explicit), see works on Digital Sovereignty by (Asmolov, 2021; Price, 1994, 1996).

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policy can be used to correct power imbalances and mitigate social harm by internet platforms. He writes, ‘the social contract concept helps make explicit the power relationships between communication/media firms, regulators, and members of the public. It also underscores the contingent and conditional aspects of these relationships’ (Pickard, 2021: 325–326). This approach works to move beyond formal political theory and orients this project around the social contract as an analytical framework, making its application more straightforward.

For his part, Pickard addresses the implications of this as an applied technique for the analysis of relationships in cyberspace. Notably, he assumes a two-sided relationship between platforms and the societies/users they serve, writing:

The assumption is that, given these firms special position in the market (typically monopolistic networks) and the special purpose of the service they deliver (typically essential public services such as transportation, electricity, water, or, in the case of the platforms, information and communication), they must deliver on specific democratic obligations to society (Pickard, 2021: 326).

Theories surrounding the possible shape/composition of this obligation take many forms, but the idea that platforms have ‘specific obligations to society’ can be witnessed in almost every proposal to enact governance reforms for these companies. These include imposing new fiduciary responsibilities (Balkin, 2020; Haupt, 2020; Pozen & Khan, 2019 (critique); Zittrain & Balkin, 2016), creating “duty of care” requirements (Moore & Tambini, 2021; Online Safety Bill, 2022; Tambini, 2019), embedding transparency and equity into moderation and privacy regimes (Gillespie, 2018), and emphasizing public value-centric principles in platform design (van Dijck *et al.*, 2018: 139–146). In each of these proposals, although they approach the question of regulating platforms from different directions, they show how, as an approach to platform policy, the idea of a social contract is not just a philosophical, but also a practical approach to understanding issues of power within Meta’s relations with users and society.

Platform Power

Across several sectors of the internet economy, past literature on platforms has sought to understand how they are structured, how they operate, and how they impact society.

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Oftentimes, at the core of these inquiries is a shared concern around power; both in the sense of economic power, but oftentimes social power as well. In the former, van Dijck et al. (2018), Graef (2018), Moore & Tambini (2021), and Nielsen & Ganter (2022) all examine platform power from a primarily structural and economic perspective. In the latter, Bucher (2021), Tambini (2018), Haimson & Hoffmann (2016), Castells (2013b, 2014), and Couldry & Hepp (2016) each approach the question of platform power from the perspective of societal impact. Although quite different from one another, each of these perspectives—one economic, the other social—are an important context for this research. Building on the earlier section, the social contract approach applied in this study presupposes a certain balancing of the two; economics being the primary interest of corporations, and the mediation of social power being the primary interest of users and society. Often the two overlap; where Meta can justify its social power, it often achieves certain economic benefits (providing insulation from competition, preempting regulation, growing its market share). Drawing from this assumption, this study builds up its theoretical framework.

Beginning with the structural/economic analysis of platforms, according to Dutch academic José van Dijck, part of the success of platforms is that “they offer personalized services and contribute to innovation and economic growth while efficiently bypassing incumbent organizations, cumbersome regulations, and unnecessary expenses” (van Dijck 2018: 1). In their rise, platforms push the limits of existing legal frameworks and go beyond traditional institutions to create more efficient means of doing business. Companies like Expedia cut out the expensive role of incumbents like travel consultants, Airbnb connects hosts and guests without the overhead of the hotel industry, and Google/YouTube created an entirely new means of curating and accessing content. So too, does Meta produce an efficient and novel means of linking its users to friends, family, and businesses (Gillespie, 2018: 14–16).

However, Meta’s constitutive services are not just any platforms. According to van Dijck et al., companies such as Meta are ‘infrastructural platforms’ upon ‘which other platforms and services are built’ (van Dijck *et al.*, 2018: 12–13). This gives them the economic power to serve in the role of ‘online gatekeepers through which data flows are managed, processed, stored,

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and channeled' (van Dijck *et al.*, 2018: 13); enabling Meta (and other infrastructural providers such as Google, Apple, Microsoft, and Amazon) to dominate markets and set the standards within them. In this argument, Van Dijck's assertion is echoed and affirmed by (Graef, 2018; Moore & Tambini, 2018: sec. 1, 2021; Pickard, 2021: 324–325), and (Nielsen & Ganter, 2022: Ch. 5). This role is what causes Meta's policy communications to take on such significance; not only do they set policy standards for the company's platforms, but they also dictate standards for the sector and the services built on the company's platforms. Solely from an observational perspective, even smaller competitors with different policy models such as Twitter, TikTok, and Gab generally react in some manner to how Meta comes down on a given issue. Absent government regulation, this level of influence provides Meta with the autonomy to decide many policy issues as it sees fit (Nielsen & Ganter, 2022: 158–159). It also means that Meta can approach future regulation from a position of strength in lobbying policymakers—many of whom are scrambling to amend such policies as 'safe harbor' provisions, antitrust frameworks, and privacy laws left largely unchanged for much of the internet era (Nielsen & Ganter, 2022: 159–160).

Yet, in its rapid growth over the past few decades, Meta has gained not just economic power, but immense civic and social power as well. Not only do Meta and its peers have immense access to personal information, but according to Martin Moore, tech companies have, "the power to enable collective action, the power to communicate news, and the power to influence people's vote" (Moore, 2016: 4). This argument is reinforced by the work of both Couldry and Castells on the influence of tech platforms in building political networks—although the former expresses some skepticism on the longevity of those networks (Castells, 2013a; Couldry, 2015), this places Meta in a unique position. Akin to traditional media organizations before it, Meta holds sway over public discourse and civic actions, however, it does so in a manner that far eclipses the capabilities of those earlier media forms. Its platforms are ubiquitous, they are real-time, and the company's algorithms accelerate discourse across society in a manner that is entirely novel. This immense power even led the executive editor of *The Atlantic*, Adrienne LaFrance, to dub Meta 'The Largest Autocracy on Earth' (LaFrance, 2021).

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According to Professor Taina Bucher, Meta's stratospheric rise is partially attributable to the degree to which the platform has built authenticity and trust into its platform architecture (Bucher, 2021). In the context of this research, this is significant because trust and authenticity should be understood as a cornerstone of the platform's argument for libertarian government policy and self-regulation (Tambini *et al.*, 2007: Ch. 1, 11, 12). According to Bucher, when Facebook was launched in 2004, it was one of hundreds of social media sites on the internet (Bucher, 2021: 79). What made the platform stand out from its competitors was a.) the ability for outside developers to build on top of Facebook's architecture, and b.) its encoding of 'authenticity' from the very beginning (Boyd & Ellison, 2007: 218; Bucher, 2021: 79; Haimson & Hoffmann, 2016). In the first, Facebook was noteworthy for enabling developers to create 'applications' on the platform; building off of its basic architecture to provide greater functionality to users (Boyd & Ellison, 2007: 218). Even beyond third-party applications, embedded in this corporate approach is a critical principle, agility; something that enables Meta to quickly respond in the face of new developments that threaten the social/business/political success of its business.

However, the latter is far more significant. According to Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg, 'what we focused on from the beginning is that people has their real identity there and were sharing with people who were real friends and family' (Bucher, 2021: 82). In contrast to other sites whose profiles were anonymous, this "real-name" policy provided Facebook users with a greater sense of authenticity and security within platform interactions (Bucher, 2021: 83; Haimson & Hoffmann, 2016). This is echoed in Professor Ari Waldman's observation that Meta is 'built on trust: the trust that exists between friends and the trust that exists between users and the platform' (Waldman, 2016: 195–197). The result of this is that Meta can justify its vast regimes of surveillance capitalism that underpin the company's ad-based revenue model and algorithmic development (Zuboff, 2015). Despite the numerous scandals since 2016 such as Russian electoral interference and Cambridge Analytica, the trust that enables Meta to carry out these activities remains central to how the company operates.

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Understanding Policy as Text and as Discourse

At its core, the target of this research is not just how the social contract can be understood to exist within this space, but also how it is constructed and applied through platform policies and communications. This happens through a mechanism that begins in discourse (e.g., public relations, government lobbying, marketing), and is implemented through formal texts (e.g., laws, documents, contracts) that codify user interactions with the platform. Although the documents examined in this study are primarily of discursive value, their plausible influence on government policy is nonetheless viewed as a driver behind the strategic message that they seek to communicate. While there is a substantial difference between government (state) policy and internal corporate policy, this study views strategic communications of the latter to be part of efforts for influencing the former. This assertion is supported by past academic inquiry into how corporate-government relationships in other industries such as Big Tobacco (McDaniel & Malone, 2005), influence policy-making. In that case, the US Tobacco Control Act (123 Stat. 1776, 2009).

Working to define policy, Steven Ball writes that policy exists on two levels: one textual, the other discursive (1993: 10). Both are important here. Ball states that ‘policy as text’ relies on “*ad hoc*”⁶, negotiation, and serendipity within the state, within the policy formulation process” (1993: 11). In this view, policies are “textual interventions into practice,” and matter because they “consist of texts which are (sometimes) acted upon” (Ball, 1993: 12; Beilharz, 1987: 394). Once written down, ‘policy as text’ evolves from something hypothetical into something far more concrete; either regulation requiring compliance (if by the state), or a commitment to act in a certain way (by individual or non-state actors including corporations). The implications of this are addressed by several authors: in addition to Ball, Offe (1984), and Riseborough (1994) both show that, even when policy is written with clear intention, its true impact arises from a discursive process. Offe writes, “state policy merely establishes the location and timing of the contest, its subject matter and ‘the rules of the game’” (Offe, 1984: 106). This underscores

⁶ Latin for ‘the use of improvised measures as opposed to long-term strategy.’

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the objectives of policy lobbying activities; to succeed is to influence not just the game, but the rules by which it is played.

Moving to ‘policy as discourse’, Ball taps into an area of study concerned with the role of power and powerful actors in the policy formulation process. For this field, Carol Bacchi provides an excellent review of the existing literature in her article *Policy as Discourse* (Bacchi, 2000: 45). In that article, she details how, while Stephen Ball and another theorist, Murray Edelman (1988), were some of the first to connect discourse to policy studies, both acknowledge their “debt” to 20th Century social theorist Michel Foucault (Bacchi, 2000: 48). In *The Order of Discourse*, Foucault writes that, although ‘discourse may seem of little account...the prohibitions to which it is subject reveal soon enough its links with desire and power’ (Foucault, 1971, in Ball, 1993: 14). ‘Policy as discourse’ taps into these linkages and applies a critical eye toward how policy is constructed via a discursive process — a process that de-centers the state; establishing it as a “product of discourse, a point in the diagram of power” (Ball, 1993: 14).

More than just a form of relations, discourses are ‘practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak; they do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention’ (Foucault, 1977, in Bacchi, 2000: 48). Corporate policy communications for an external audience seek to do just this. Through discourse, companies like Meta elevate objects of concern while often concealing their intentions for doing so. If successful, this ‘policy as discourse’ will evolve into ‘policy as text’ and, although interpretation is important in the latter, by preempting the policy formation process, Meta can work towards elevating the interests that it values most. As an element of the social contract here, this encapsulates the role of ‘policy as discourse’ in Meta’s policy communications; it allows the company to work towards shaping its regulatory and business environment through stakeholder lobbying. Ultimately, the key point here is that policy is not just ‘what governments do,’ but a complex process in which public and private interests are weighed to determine outcomes (Bacchi, 2000: 48–50).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Given the lines of conceptual inquiry outlined above, this project sets out to answer the following research questions:

Question 1: Can Meta's policy communications be understood as promoting the 'idea' of a social contract through discourse, and what role does the company promote for itself?

Question 2: Who/What is Meta's Audience?

Question 3: What are the limits of that relationship?

RESEARCH DESIGN

Integrating the Social Contract into a Qualitative Textual Analysis of Responsibility

Drawing from the theoretical frame in this study, the social contract (along with issues of platform power and policy discourse) is understood as being articulated via notions of responsibility. This is an assertion supported by the literature. Beyond the relational element inherent in Gillespie's assertion that large tech companies operate as 'custodians of the internet' (2018), the role of communicated responsibility as a form of corporate relationship-building is well established in communications studies. This is most evident in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) studies which show how responsibility-based dialogues are used to build relationships in both Employer-Employee (Johansen & Nielsen, 2011; Song & Tao, 2022; Supanti *et al.*, 2015) and Corporation-Customer/Societal pairings (Beddewela & Fairbrass, 2016; Esen, 2013; M. Kim *et al.*, 2020; S. Kim & Manoli, 2022). In these studies, communications around corporate responsibility (i.e. transparency, care) are understood as an element of how corporations manage their relationship with stakeholders via discourse. In proceeding with this analysis, the research here supports the assumption that an analysis of responsibility within the target corpora will be fruitful in accomplishing the aims of this study.

Moreover, beyond asserting the role of responsibility in mediated relationships, this assumption alleviates some concerns that issues of performativity/disingenuity will

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undermine the results of this study. These concerns stem from critical research on issues of performativity in institutional communications such as Frances Bowen (2014) on greenwashing and Sara Ahmed (2012) on diversity in higher education. For this reason, the study only focuses on one specific type of text: public policy documents intended for an external audience. As shown, communicated responsibility plays an important role in how corporations construct their relationship with a given audience. Whether that is performative or disingenuous is significant, however, because the objective of this study is to analyze how Meta shapes its relationship to users/society through discourse, those elements are important to include in the analysis. Whether or not the language is sincere, it remains a component of how the company promotes itself and uses discourse to achieve its goals. Including those documents in the dataset aids to ensure that the corpora used in this study are reflective of the nuances in Meta's real-world policy discourse.

Sampling

This research proceeds via a mixed-methods qualitative approach involving two overlapping corpora (collections of text). The first is a curated corpus of 471⁷ policy communications texts issued by Meta on <https://about.fb.com/news/> during the five years between 1 January 2017 and 31 December 2021 (*Appendix I*). This period was chosen because it begins after a critical pivot point in which Meta (then Facebook) came under criticism by both governments and users for its negative role in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election, undermining the company's credibility. It also marks a time in which the company substantially increased the frequency of its policy communications—up from just a few articles a year from 2010 to 2016 to multiple publications per month. These are grouped by the following topics: 'Company news,' 'Technology and Innovation,' 'Data and Privacy,' 'Safety and Expression,' 'Combating Misinformation,' 'Economic Opportunity,' 'Election Integrity,' and 'Strengthening Communities,' and 'Diversity and Inclusion.' Because these categories span the entirety of

⁷ Due to minor issues with Sketch Engine's web scraping tool, while 475 documents were initially included in the corpus, the analysis was ultimately conducted across 471 texts. Because this issue affected <1% of documents, this was seen as insignificant, and the analysis proceeded without those 4 texts.

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Meta's public relations, the five topic areas indicated in bold were chosen due to their explicit focus on policy issues.⁸ Oftentimes, a given article was categorized into more than one category, when this happened, all were recorded (see *Appendix I*). Collection was performed by hand and the articles were ordered by date for clarity. Whenever an article served as a summary for an attached document (i.e. quarterly reports), only the summary was used.

The second corpus is drawn from the first and consists of four documents, all written by corporate executives at Facebook with a role in policymaking and strategy decisions (*Appendix II*). This smaller corpus includes two documents written by Mark Zuckerberg (Founder and Chief Executive Officer), one written by Nick Clegg (Meta President of Global Affairs), and one written by Adam Mosseri (Head of Instagram). Because each of these authors is responsible for multiple documents in the larger corpus, only those articles with the greatest relevance were chosen for analysis.

Building a Mixed-Methods Approach

Using the corpora, this study approaches the task at hand via a bipartite approach. This is because the answers sought through this study require both a general understanding of overall focus/ how Meta talks about responsibility through its policy communications, and a close analytical lens for specific insights regarding tone, audience, and rhetoric. It is a technique aimed at knowing what is often kept intimate: the desires, strategies, and pressures of a modern communications apparatus. This combines two established empirical techniques; computer-assisted text analysis and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach. The first enables an automated analysis of frequencies and language across the 471-document corpus—identifying keywords, terms, and collocations (common word/phrasal pairings). The second applies a rigorous tripartite framework to the second corpus of four texts to generate textual, discursive, and socio-cultural knowledge (Fairclough, 1995: 58–68). Although more

⁸ Initially all of Meta's documents were collected, however, this study elects to use a curated approach because the other categories focus on texts whose primary purpose is not policy (e.g. texts with a primarily product marketing, client-focused communications).

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complex than traditional qualitative methods, this dual approach is not entirely novel; its application is discussed in a 2012 book by Paul Baker (2012).

Computer-assisted text analysis is a proven technique for researching lexicological information across a large corpus of documents. The technology used here is an internet-based software called Sketch Engine,⁹ used in several peer-reviewed studies over the past 20 years (Balfour, 2019; Kilgarriff *et al.*, 2014; Kunilovskaya & Koviagina, 2017; Pearce, 2008; Wang & Yang, 2019). Sketch Engine has two primary uses—one that utilizes the platform’s existing corpus database (primarily for lexicography), and another that allows users to upload their own corpus for analysis. This study employs the latter; importing all 471 articles onto the platform via its integrated ‘web scraping’ tool and using several available tools to parse through the data. The first analysis used the software’s ‘term’ function to return a frequency-based list of common phrases. Subsequent analyses then used the software’s ‘word-sketch’, ‘collocation’, and ‘thesaurus’ tools to 1.) pull and catalogue uses of “responsible” with context, 2.) develop a list of common verbs, and 3.) analyze how responsibility is attributed across the corpus.

In the second part of the study, as advocated by Gerlinde Mautner (2012: 34–35), those findings via computer-assisted text analysis were merged with a tripartite Fairclough Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the second corpus. Although there are other approaches to CDA (Machin & Mayr, 2012; van Dijk, 1993; Wodak & Meyer, 2016), this method aligns with the desired aims of this research because Norman Fairclough’s technique recognizes that the relationship between texts and society is dialectic in that each constructs and is constructed by the other (Fairclough, 1995: 34, 2013a: 3, 2013b: 179). Not only does this approach satisfy the poststructuralist aims of this study, inspired by Foucault’s understanding of power (Foucault,

⁹ <https://www.sketchengine.eu/>

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1977, 1991),¹⁰ but it also echoes the earlier relationship between policy as discourse/as text championed by Ball (1993) and its efficacy was proven in an early pilot study from May 2022.

As Fairclough's CDA requires an approach that is transdisciplinary and systematic (Fairclough, 2013a: 11), its use in this study is critical. Beyond generating evidence, CDA also performs a reflexive function; allowing for the empirical questions guiding the analysis to be refined as new information is brought to light. The technique for CDA here is covered in Table 1:

Textual	This involves processing each text linguistically—looking at the structure, verbiage, grammar, and syntax through which information is relayed (Fairclough, 1995: 61).
Discursive	After the textual analysis, each text is then analyzed (individually and as part of the corpus) to identify intertextual elements, themes, perspectives, and responses to criticism (Fairclough, 1995: 61–68). This is a largely interpretive exercise, however, by incorporating insights from the initial computer-assisted text analysis, that analytical process will be somewhat directed.
Socio-Cultural	The final stage is to analyze the texts for how they respond/consider wider social/economic/policy concerns and tackle issues of positionality, intended audience, and questions of ideology, power, and hegemony (Fairclough, 2013a: 57–67). Fairclough admits that some of these are more difficult to identify than others (Fairclough, 2013a: 57), however, the role of the researcher in generating insights through CDA remains one of its greatest strengths, and this flexibility contributes to its application.

Table 1: Description of Fairclough CDA

These combined methodologies aim to provide a holistic analysis of Meta via how the company communicates its practices, perspectives, and intentions. Moreover, it is designed such that it may address the study's stated research objectives.

10 Note: While this study uses CDA as its critical methodology of choice, the questions at hand require the introduction of some influence from poststructuralist discourse analysis (PDA) to understand how 'language, actions and objects are intertwined' (Fairclough, 2013b: 181). While there are some differences between CDA and PDA, this is not unheard of and Fairclough even advocates for this combined approach in policy analysis (Fairclough, 2013b: 190–193).

Limitations

To briefly address the limitations of this combined methodology, while mixing computer-assisted text analysis with Fairclough's CDA does ensure greater reliability and validity (Mautner, 2012: 34), certain limitations do remain. While these techniques reinforce one another somewhat (computer-assisted text analysis providing general insight into a large archive, CDA enabling close textual analysis of a few texts), they are nonetheless qualitative methodologies. This means that, above all else, the results generated via these techniques are subjective and non-replicable, in strong contrast to more quantitative methodologies (Billig, 1999; Schegloff, 1997). Although this is a limitation, it is certainly not a weakness, and the positioning of the researcher is acknowledged to never be external to society (Wodak & Meyer, 2016: 7). This enables an iterative approach that works to improve the overall quality of analysis and further increase empirical validity (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000: 455–456; Wodak & Meyer, 2016: 28). Further consideration of research limitations will be revisited in the 'discussion' section of this paper.

FINDINGS

Results of the Computer-Assisted Text Analysis

The corpus in this study resulted in an analysis of 494,161 tokens (words + nonwords) across the 471 Meta policy documents sampled. Table 1 provides total figures for the content contained in the corpus:

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Language	English
Tokens	494,161
Words	431, 660
Sentences	22, 908
Paragraphs	11,031
Documents	471
Unique Words	15,828
Lemmas (base words)	10,388

Table 2: Corpus figures

This provided a sufficiently large dataset from which to query data, conduct analyses, and generate results.

Analysis of Common Terms

To begin, Sketch Engine was queried to provide a term-based listing of common phrases in the corpus (n>50). The intent of this was to understand the 'geography' of Meta's policy communications and the company's primary areas of concern. Table 3 provides a listing of the ten most frequently used terms within the overall corpus:¹¹

¹¹ Note: Some upper-limit hits that would distort the results have been removed from this listing (i.e., website banners/disclaimer terms that are present on most or all the pages in the corpus).

Item	Frequency
social medium	274
hate speech	272
news feed	256
community standards	207
fake account	178
human right	155
inauthentic behavior	134
political ad	132
false news	129
coordinated inauthentic behavior	116

Table 3: Top ten terms in the corpus by frequency. For a complete listing of terms see Appendix III.

Unsurprisingly, ‘social medium’ is the most common term used in Meta’s policy communications, almost exclusively in the context of rhetorical self-reference. However, other entries on this list are interesting in that they show an explicit corporate focus on policy issues impacting social cohesion and user safety. Among the top ten terms are ‘Community Standards’, ‘Fake Account’, ‘Inauthentic Behavior’, ‘False News’, and ‘Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior’; all terms that relate to the cohesiveness of Meta’s communities and how the company’s platforms impact both society and individual users.

Bringing in the remainder of terms with frequency $n > 50$, *Fig. 1* shows how Meta’s policy communications slant towards addressing issues of this type:

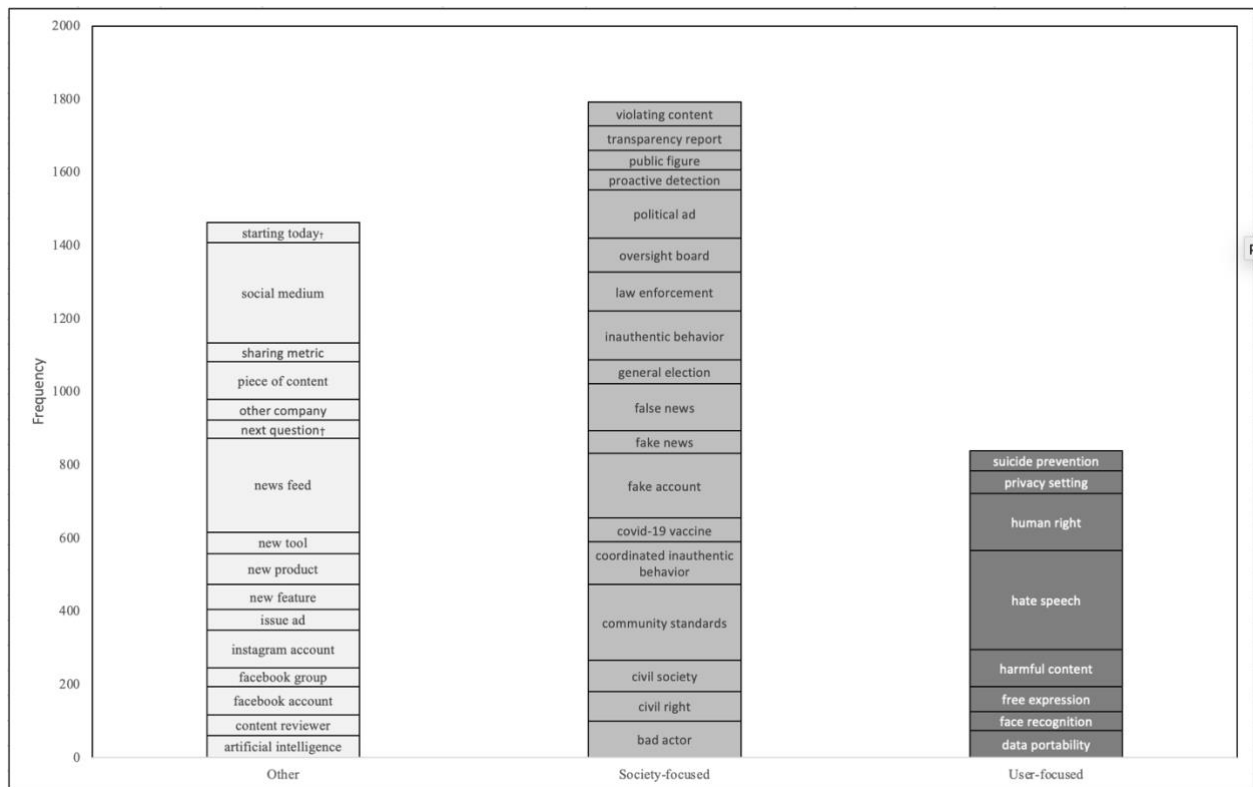


Fig. 1: Top 50 corpus terms (n>50) by focus

† Indicates general linguistic constructions unrelated to the analysis

Although the results here are influenced by the sampling strategy used in this study, the chart shows that language focusing on society/user-centric issues makes up the majority of the top 50 terms within Meta’s relevant policy communications (n = 2632 to n = 1463).¹² Moving to the ‘other’ column shows that there are few terms (e.g. ‘content reviewer’, ‘artificial intelligence’) relating to topics unconcerned with society or users. The remainder here fall into one of two categories: either general linguistic constructions indicated by ‘†’ or categorization terms¹³ that describe an area of Meta’s business rather than an issue the company can address through policymaking.

12 Note: although the categorizations here are subjective, each term was placed into its respective column based on researcher discretion regarding how it was used in-context and reference to this study on online platforms commissioned by the European Parliament: (Gawer, 2021).

13 E.g., “piece of content”, “news feed”, “new tool”, “new product,” “new feature,” “instagram account,” “facebook group,” and “facebook account”.

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Analysis of Responsibility Attribution

The next analysis using *Sketch Engine* focused on how the keyword 'responsible' is used within the corpus. Using the program's *Word Sketch* function, the software returned 62 uses of 'responsible' in the corpus, each accompanied by its context (*Appendix IV*). These run the gamut from discussions of "Responsible AI" (e.g., #2,4) and political moments/ extremism/ etc. (e.g., #3,10) to explanations of corporate structure (e.g., #8, #9) and more. Importantly, in this listing are Meta's attributions of responsibility for policy activities. They generally fall into one of three categories:

The first is attribution of responsibility to an external actor:

57	...We are committed to vigorously enforcing our policies to protect people's information. </s><s> We will take whatever steps are required to see that this happens. </s><s> We will take legal action if necessary to hold them	responsible	and accountable for any unlawful behavior. </s><s> How Things Have Changed </s><s> We are constantly working to improve the safety and experience of everyone on Facebook...
----	--	-------------	--

The second is a reflexive attribution to Meta, one of the company's platforms, or one of its employees/teams:

34	...We can't change the fact that people will always try to post bad things on Facebook – whether it is hate speech, terrorist propaganda or images that exploit children. </s><s> But we can try to control how many times content that violates our Community Standards is seen. </s><s> As the head of data analytics, I lead the team that is	responsible	for measuring our work in this area, so the company can better understand how effective we are at enforcing our policies...
----	--	-------------	---

The third is a general attribution of responsibility (primarily as an ideal/principle):

20	...Their attack included taking advantage of open online platforms – such as Facebook – to divide Americans, and to spread fear, uncertainty and doubt. </s><s> Now, none of us can turn back the clock, but we are all	responsible	for making sure the same kind of attack our democracy does not happen again. </s><s> And we are taking our role in that effort very, very seriously...
----	---	-------------	--

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Together these examples show how Meta attributes responsibility throughout the corpus. It is noteworthy here that, apart from its use as a descriptor in terms such as ‘responsible AI’, the company approaches the question through one of these three approaches: ‘our responsibility’, ‘their responsibility’, and ‘all of our responsibility’. This speaks to the delicate balancing of power that Meta works to convey through its policy communications.

Analysis of Responsibility Verbiage

Importantly, however, responsibility requires action. Diving deeper into the analysis, this study also used Sketch Engine’s keyword function to sample four common verbs from the corpus along with their collocations (common word pairings). This included the words *detect*, *ensure*, *combat*, and *protect* (*Appendix V*). What this revealed is that, beyond Meta’s explicit use of the word “responsible,” the company conveys a similar understanding of its role through verbs that express action, take a strong stance against user/social harm, and communicate concern:

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Term	Collocate	Frequency
detect	content	15
	activity	6
	fraud	4
	behavior	4
ensure	people	15
	privacy	6
	integrity	4
	compliance	3
combat	misinformation	18
	hate	9
	interference	8
	terrorism	6
protect	people	50
	privacy	45
	election	35
	integrity	18

Table 4: Sampling of common verbiage in corpus with collocations and frequency

Shown in the table¹⁴ is a clear conveyance of responsibility; one that presents Meta's policy actions as an active response to issues the platform faces (e.g. Detect Fraud, Ensure Privacy, Combat Misinformation, Protect People). It also shows a clear overlap with the list of common terms presented earlier. Not only is Meta communicating its responsibility, but it uses those issues of greatest consequence to do so.

Results of the Critical Discourse Analysis

Moving to the Critical Discourse Analysis component of this study, the primary objective was to apply the findings of the computer-assisted text analysis and discover, in greater detail, how

¹⁴ Note: This is a curated list of verbs based on a determination of relevance. For the full, unedited listing of collocations, please see Appendix V.

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chief executives at Meta communicate policy issues. In doing so, the four articles examined were pulled for their authors' respective authority in determining the company's policy agenda. The assumption here is that, due to their provenance, these articles would be the clearest distillation of Meta's corporate voice and reflect nuances in how the company considers its place vis-à-vis users and society-at-large. The findings from this analysis are broken into the following three categories: voice/tone, balancing of interests, and framing of responsibility.

Authorial Voice and Tone

While the articles are written by three different authors, they share a unified voice/tone; one that conveys a sense of humility, authority, and authenticity within their respective discussions of policy issues confronting the company. This reflects past research (Bucher, 2021: 83; Haimson & Hoffmann, 2016; Waldman, 2016). It creates a sense of trust within each of the texts surveyed, a trust that Meta both understands the issues at hand and can address them effectively. The following passage by Mark Zuckerberg in *Understanding Facebook's Business Model* illustrates this point:

If you believe in a world where everyone gets an opportunity to use their voice and an equal chance to be heard, where anyone can start a business from scratch, then it's important to build technology that serves everyone. That's the world we're building for every day, and our business model makes it possible (Zuckerberg, Appendix II, Doc.2).

In this passage is an undeniable idealism, one that treats issues on Meta's platforms as an ancillary concern, one that the company is working to address but does not take away from the value of its services. It frames the company's services as being in the interests of the reader, aligning their interests with Meta's own and communicating the company as a vanguard for the public interest. Put another way, "what is good for Meta is good for the world" and society and users by extension.

Where this is made especially clear is in Adam Mosseri's article, *Taking More Steps To Keep The People Who Use Instagram Safe*. Moreso than Clegg or Zuckerberg, Mosseri communicates

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platform policy at Instagram in a manner that works to emphasize with the reader; referencing his conversations with experts and users impacted by suicide and self-harm content to show his understanding of the issue at hand. The following passage illustrates this use of language:

In my conversations with young people who have struggled with these issues, I've heard that the same image might be helpful to someone one day, but triggering the next. That's why we don't allow people to share content that encourages or promotes self-harm or suicide (Mosseri, Appendix II, Doc.4).

This is an effective use of rhetoric and further engenders the trust of the user in how Meta is working to address issues on its platforms. It humanizes the company while addressing its issues and reinforcing its role as an organization working to protect those who use its services. Although Instagram's unique targeting of a younger audience within Meta's product ecosystem may explain Mosseri's heightened tonality, it is nonetheless consistent with each of the other executive communications examined.

Rhetorical Balancing of Issues

Moving on, this tonality is critical in how each of the authors describes Meta's approach to policy issues on its platforms. That is, they describe these issues as incredibly complex, but that Meta works in good faith to balance its interests with those of users and society. This theme of 'balancing' policy options and stakeholder interests is consistent throughout each of the documents surveyed. The following passages provide evidence for this assertion:

Every day, platforms like Facebook have to make trade-offs on important social values— between free expression and safety, privacy and law enforcement, and between creating open systems and locking down data (Zuckerberg, Appendix II, Doc.1)

I want to be unambiguous: Facebook does not profit from hate. Billions of people use Facebook and Instagram because they have good experiences — they don't want to see hateful content, our advertisers don't want to see it, and we don't want to see it. There is no incentive for us to do anything but remove it (Clegg, Appendix II, Doc.3).

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Two things are true about online communities, and they are in conflict with one another. First, the tragic reality is that some young people are influenced in a negative way by what they see online... But at the same time, there are many young people who are coming online to get support with the struggles they're having...Based on expert advice... we aim to strike the difficult balance between allowing people to share their mental health experiences while also protecting others from being exposed to potentially harmful content. (Mosseri, Appendix II, Doc.4).

Although they are speaking on different issues, each author describes the company's approach to policy issues as a balancing act; one in which Meta operates in the gray to produce the policy response that it believes is best suited to the issue at hand. In each of these quotes, the authors express an understanding of the corporate obligation to decide policy issues in favor of the public interest on behalf of users and society. In doing so, the theme of balance provides the reader with both a sense of the complexity inherent in these issues and the impression that the company is doing its best to confront them through policy.

Framing of Responsibility

How the authors arrive at these answers is the focus of the third theme under consideration here: the framing of responsibility. As shown from the computer-assisted text analysis, Meta's framing, and consideration of responsibility in solving these issues fall into one of three attribution categories: external, reflexive, and general ideal. Because each of these articles serves a slightly different purpose, their attributions differ, but this categorization still holds. Apart from Document 1, whose primary purpose is to advocate for new policy guidelines (and thus largely attributes responsibility to governments and regulators), the remainder are largely reflexive with some attributions to an ideal scattered throughout. This includes the following passages:

Ultimately, I believe the most important principles around data are transparency, choice and control. We need to be clear about the ways we're using information, and people need to have clear choices about how their information is used (Zuckerberg, Appendix II, Doc.2).

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... with more than 3 billion people using Facebook's apps every month, everything that is good, bad and ugly in our societies will find expression on our platform. That puts a big responsibility on Facebook and other social media companies to decide where to draw the line over what content is acceptable (Clegg, Appendix II, Doc.3).

We at Instagram owe it to everyone who uses our platform — especially those who may be at risk of suicide and self-harm — to do everything we can to keep them safe (Mosseri, Appendix II, Doc.4).

As shown here, for the most part, Meta's approach to tackling issues caused by its platforms is to assume responsibility and explain its response. This further engenders trust with the reader and is only reinforced via the data and references to partnerships with trusted external organizations such as the World Health Organization (Doc.3), and Samaritans UK (Doc.4). Moreover, the company tempers its discussion of policy successes with language such as 'our systems are still evolving and improving' (Doc.2), and 'the work here is never done' (Doc.4). This further conveys the company's tone of authenticity that it works to convey in its policy responses.

Principal Findings

Given the above results, the mixed-methods qualitative analysis supports the following findings that reflect the questions put forth in the literature review.

Finding 1 (Response to RQ1)

Meta can be understood as promoting the 'idea' of a social contract relationship between itself and users through policy communications by framing itself as a responsible arbiter of the public interest, one with the desire to use its power for the protection of both users and society.

In approaching the corpora to generate this finding, the analysis was concerned with two key issues surfaced in the literature review: that of the social contract, and of platform power. To refresh, in the first, Victor Pickard's assertion of social contract theory's application in platform studies provides that, given firms' privileged position in the market and the essential nature of their services, they must deliver on "specific democratic obligations to society" (Pickard,

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2021: 326). The second concerns Meta's understanding of its platform power; namely, the degree to which its economic/social power influences and delineates concerns in the public sphere as articulated by Bucher, Moore, Tambini, and others (Bucher, 2021: 79; Moore, 2016: 4; Tambini *et al.*, 2007: Ch. 1,11,12). To that end, the analysis sought out 1.) places in the data where Meta emphasizes issues with acute impact on individuals and society, and 2.) places in which the company explicitly and/or implicitly signals a reflexive understanding of platform power via attributions of responsibility.

Following this, the determination above is based on empirical data generated via both the computer-assisted text analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) components of this study. In the first, the computer-assisted text analysis provides evidence of two trends in the corpus: 1.) a heightened use of terminology concerned with users and/or society, and 2.) an active, reflexive, attribution of responsibility upon Meta for solving issues on the company's platforms. In the second, these findings are reaffirmed in the analysis provided by Fairclough's CDA approach; providing data on the linguistic, discursive, and socio-cultural elements that were unavailable due to the constraints of the first methodology.

The significance of issues concerning individuals and society within the corpora is reflected in the data. Through the computer-assisted text analysis, the data reveals that 64%¹⁵ of the top 50 terms with frequency $n > 50$ promote issues intimately concerned with individual users or society (Analysis of Common Terms: *Fig. 1*). The prevalence of these terms in the corpus illustrates their emphasis within the policy communications surveyed and indicates the company's focus on contributing its voice to these types of discourse. It also provides a lens into how Meta communicates its awareness of these policy issues and approaches the 'idea' of social contract responsibilities by confronting those issues head-on.

Moving to questions of social power, this communicated awareness is only effective rhetorically because Meta mirrors it with active communicated responsibility. In the corpora,

15 (Society-focused Frequency + User-focused Frequency) / (Total Frequency)

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this is evidenced by how the company attributes responsibility: either to an external actor, reflexively, or to an ideal/principle. Although each is important, within the context of social power, the reflexive attribution component is of greatest significance. Coupled with the findings on active responsibility verbiage, the data shows how Meta not only expresses its awareness of platform issues, but also takes responsibility, somewhat, for mediating their effects and protecting both users and society (also supported by the findings of how Meta frames its own responsibility).

Finding 1 also asserts that Meta frames itself as a “responsible arbiter of the public interest.” Although this seemingly inserts a new dimension into the argument here, it is nothing more than a reaffirmation of the above determinations made available through the study’s mixed-methods analytical approach. In the executive communications analyzed, the company’s leadership frames the company as a responsible arbiter of the public interest by employing an authorial tone that discusses policy in a manner that is humble, authentic, and authoritative. This works to engender trust between the company and its audience while presenting Meta as an institution that works in the interest of users and society. As a company built on trust (Waldman, 2016: 195–197), this is a critical component of understanding Meta’s discourse through the framework of a social contract; presenting the company as a responsible corporate actor worthy of the freedoms and influence granted to it by society (Pickard, 2021: 326).

Finding 2 (Response to RQ2)

The audience that Meta addresses through its communications can be understood as operating on two levels; one encompassing the general public and the other pertaining to governments and regulatory institutions charged with safeguarding the public interest.

In coming to this determination regarding the intended audience of Meta’s Policy Communications, this study expressly considered questions of Policy as Text/Policy as Discourse arising in the literature review. These arise out of Stephen Ball’s work on corporate-government relationships and the issues inherent in policy creation/implementation (Ball, 1993: 10). Notably, this presents the relationship between the regulator and regulated as one

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formed via a complex, multipolar process; de-centering the state in the policy-making process. The foundation of this is Foucault's fundamental assertion that discourses are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak; they do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention" (Foucault, 1977, in Bacchi, 2000: 48). By explicitly considering the audience here, this study works to understand how Meta uses policy discourse to communicate its argument for limited regulation and vision for industry-wide policy to both users and the government/regulatory institutions charged with safeguarding the public interest. Just as both individual users and society are stakeholders in Meta's social contract, they are also understood in the corpora as distinct audiences.

This expands upon the assertion made in Finding 1. Understood as constructing the framework of a social contract between itself and users/society, Meta casts itself as an authentic, humble, and responsible entity with concern for the public interest (Sect. 6.3.1). This not only works to build trust with the public, but it also supports the company's advocacy towards government policymakers seeking to impose regulations on its business. Although this research will not go so far as to claim a parallel between this approach and that of Big Tobacco in the late 20th Century, there are some similarities here in how strategic policy communications are being used to speak directly with government powerbrokers and influence industry policymaking (123 Stat. 1776, 2009; McDaniel & Malone, 2005).

Determining the first audience understood here needs little justification. After all, given that these are external communications, users and groups of users are the primary assumed audience targeted within the corpora. Understood via an economic lens, convincing this audience of Meta's responsibility is important because their continued membership and use of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp are what generate revenue for the company. Although few users are likely to read these documents, the discourse that they promote often makes its way into secondary sources (e.g. Constine, 2018; Lyons, 2021). Through this, Meta's promotion of issues impacting users and society (shown in Sect. 6.1.1) and attempt to push the theme of balance (Sect. 6.2.2) ultimately filter into the public sphere.

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Arguably, however, the ones reading Meta's policy communications will likely be those tasked with understanding the company's internal policies, concerns, and approaches to platform issues. This encompasses academics (as in this study), NGOs, etc., however, the most important audience for these materials is certainly the governments and state institutions working to regulate Meta's business. Recognition of this is evidenced by how Meta attributes responsibility and advocates for policy across the corpora. Not only does the Critical Discourse Analysis incorporate a document expressly intended for policy advocacy (*Appendix II*, Doc. 1), but Meta often attributes responsibility for solving policy issues to either external actors or broad ideals/principles (Sect. 6.1.3, Sect. 6.2.3). These work to redirect responsibility away from the company and promote the sense that although Meta is doing its best to protect users and society, many issues will remain due to government inaction and an opaque regulatory environment. In no uncertain terms, the company makes clear that, to an extent, the company desires greater guidance from policymakers on how to navigate these issues. Understanding the intended audience here as twofold contributes substantively to understanding Meta's aims and its use of policy discourse to speak directly with policymakers.

Finding 3 (Response to RQ3)

The limits of Meta's social contract with users and society are delineated by the company's understanding of its own responsibilities rather than those obligations envisioned by external actors. The company also expresses a belief that its principles for this relationship should be adopted by/regulated unto other actors in the industry.

Carrying on the assertions made in Finding 2, Finding 3 answers the question of what limits are apparent in Meta's understanding of its social contract as understood via the mixed-methods analysis. In approaching this question, the study applies the above findings and questions from the literature review to determine that, although Meta can be said to promote a social contract, it only does so on its own terms. Returning to the question of platform power, in the executive communications analyzed via Critical Discourse Analysis, the authors interestingly never consider Meta's economic power beyond discussions of how its platforms

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support NGOs (*Appendix II*, Doc. 1, 3, 4), Small Businesses (*Appendix II*, Doc. 1, 2), and advertisers (*Appendix II*, Doc. 2, 3). None of these discussions forces a reckoning with the company's monopolistic power, to use Pickard's terminology (Pickard, 2021: 326), and constitutes an almost absolute focus on the platform's social power across the texts. Across the wider corpus, the computer-assisted text analysis supports this finding, with many of the top 50 terms ($n > 50$) focusing on social issues. This leads to the determination that, as understood here, Meta limits itself only to social issues extant between itself and users/society.

Moving on, the data shows how, not only does Meta's discussion of the social contract limit itself to social issues, but also that its policy advocacy for the larger platforms industry is largely limited to those steps which the company has already taken. These include steps directly correlated with the social contract that the company sketches out through discourse. These steps include promoting transparency, choice, and control (*Appendix II*, Doc. 1, 2), improved oversight and accountability (*Appendix II*, Doc. 1), transparency in political advertising (*Appendix II*, Doc. 1), reduction of self-harm content (*Appendix II*, Doc. 4), and privacy (*Appendix II*, Doc. 1). Notably, two areas where Meta defers responsibility to government regulators are those of data-sharing and fair taxes for the internet; both areas where the company stands to benefit somewhat either from opening new areas of data collection or standardizing compliance (Carrel, 2020; Rahnama & Pentland, 2022). The company accomplishes this rhetorically through the theme of balance and by attributing responsibility away from itself and onto governments or general principles/ideals for some critical policy decisions. Not only is a social contract framework useful for framing the company's relationships with users and society, but the limits here provide a sense of how far the company is willing to go in upholding those relationships.

DISCUSSION

Extension of Findings

The preceding section outlines three findings drawn directly from the data generated via the methods in this study. First, Finding 1 asserts that “Meta can be understood as promoting the ‘idea’ of a social contract relationship between itself and users through policy communications by framing itself as a responsible arbiter of the public interest, one with the desire to use its power for the protection of both users and society” (Finding 1). Second, “the audience that Meta addresses through its communications can be understood as operating on two levels...the general public governments and regulatory institutions charged with safeguarding the public interest” (Finding 2). Third, “the limits of Meta’s social contract with users and society are delineated by the company’s understanding of its own responsibilities rather than those obligations of external actors” (Finding 3). But what are the implications of those findings?

Returning to the introduction, one conclusion supported by this study is that each of the findings above signal Meta’s fundamental desire for limited regulation (or even self-regulation). At each step of the way, as shown through the company’s policy communications, Meta works to convince its audience of both the company’s virtue and its authority/competency in handling platform issues. The most striking example of this is in the company’s executive communications surveyed here. Generally, where no guidance exists, Meta charts its own path; asking for regulatory guidance in a manner that seems more geared towards generating credibility than expressing a genuine interest in cooperation. After all, whenever policies are ultimately put forth by regulators (e.g. Cadwalladr & Campbell, 2019; Corporate Europe Observatory Staff, 2022; Kayali, 2019), Meta is often among the first to protest and lobby against such actions.

Because of this dynamic, this study ultimately concludes that the documents surveyed, varied as they are, are primarily a means for the company to manage its strategic relationships with external stakeholders. This is a determination that echoes public relations studies (Hutton,

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1999: 208–209, 211). Understanding these documents as such, Meta’s policy communications should be understood as pushing an agenda; one that serves the purpose of persuasion, advocacy, reputation management, etc. for the company (Hutton, 1999: 205–208). The end goal of that agenda being limited regulatory intervention in the company’s affairs.

Although pessimistic, these findings imply that, no more than any other corporation, Meta’s primary objective is to protect its own interests. This is not to say that Meta (or indeed its employees/executives) are bad, simply that there is a degree of performativity in how the company promotes itself via policy communications. This is not unheard of, and Meta is certainly not the only platform company conducting itself in this manner. However, what it does mean is that, far from reflecting an authentic recognition of platform power and place in society, the use of a social contract construction within Meta’s policy communications seeks to further the company’s business interests. Moreover, by using this framework to talk directly with regulators about its policy interests, Meta can promote its understanding of the world within the design of regulatory regimes in its sector.

Limitations of Findings

The primary objective of this research was to answer three questions: ‘Can Meta’s policy communications be understood as promoting the ‘idea’ of a social contract through discourse, and what role does the company promote for itself?’, ‘Who/What is Meta’s Audience?’, and ‘What are the limits of that relationship?’ These questions have been answered via the above findings in the data. By integrating two qualitative techniques—computer-assisted text analysis and Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse analysis, this research was able to approach the curated corpora of Meta’s policy communications from both a macro- and a micro-scale perspective. This technique successfully enabled a comprehensive understanding of the documents at hand as well as generating an understanding of the company’s overall stated interests, perspectives, and influences. Not only were these techniques effective, but they generated far more data than could reasonably be reported here; causing many notable findings to remain buried in the appendix. However, as these are qualitative results, some limitations must be understood when interpreting the findings of this study.

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As briefly mentioned above, all findings and conclusions rendered via this approach can only be understood as applying to the corpora used in this study and do not imply causality. Although the corpora include a significant sampling of Meta's policy communications, because that sample is somewhat curated based on applicability to the questions at hand, it is by no means an exhaustive list of everything the company has ever said and cannot be generalized to say, 'this is what Meta believes.' As such, answers to the research questions in this study are framed as "findings" rather than conclusions — only in the Extension (Sect. 7.1) is such language used to extend and synthesize the analysis of what has been found.

One benefit of working with these public communications is that many of the documents here could be analyzed (either by computer-assisted text analysis or CDA) in the manner initially intended by their author. Since qualitative techniques such as these are largely driven by the subjective inquiry of the researcher, this positionality serves to limit some issues of bias as the researcher is understood as being a member of the intended audience (Wodak & Meyer, 2016: 7). Additionally, the imposition of a mixed-method technique here also enabled a natural reflexivity in the data-collection process, providing sufficient space to incorporate new questions and understandings over time (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000: 455–456; Wodak & Meyer, 2016: 21) and counteract possible failings of methodological subjectivity (Billig, 1999; Schegloff, 1997). Ultimately, none of these limitations imposed significant issues for the analysis described and are even celebrated components of this empirical approach.

CONCLUSION

In *The Social Contract*, Jean Jacques Rousseau writes that 'What a man loses as a result of the Social Contract is his natural liberty and his unqualified right to lay hands on all that tempts him...What he gains is civil liberty and the ownership of what belongs to him' (Rousseau, 1762: sec. VIII). This is the basic framework on which modern democratic societies rest; a two-sided relationship in which citizens give up certain 'natural' liberties in return for

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incorporation as a member of society. Even transposed onto internet platforms, this framework should operate similarly: platforms such as Meta receive economic power, social power, and user data in return for providing an essential public service and delivering on “specific democratic obligations to society” (Pickard, 2021: 326). By analyzing Meta’s policy documents and using this theoretical framework to understand the company’s discourses, this study has shown that, at least on a communications level, Meta understands its obligations to users and society. However, via these policy communications, it weaponizes that understanding in a very specific manner.

The findings here show that, by understanding the company as incorporating the framework of a social contract into policy communications, Meta works to promote itself as a responsible arbiter of the public interest, speaks directly to governments and regulatory authorities, and sets out limits for the company’s responsibility in handling platform issues. In sum, these actions support the conclusion that, by promoting itself in this manner, Meta expresses its desire to self-regulate; an approach that presents clear benefits for the company and its overall business strategy.

Moving to disciplinary contribution, on a methodological level, this study has shown that combining computer-assisted text analysis with Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis presents enormous potential for producing novel data from the qualitative analysis of text. Empirically, this approach also shows that combining platform studies, public policy studies, and discourse provides an ample foundation for the analysis of corporate intent and its interaction with existing and emergent policy solutions in this space.

Future studies in this area could build on the results here in several ways. Just as this research builds on Victor Picard’s work sketching out a social contract for platforms, others may use this as a jumping-off point for an analysis of corporate ethics and social responsibility for platforms. Meta is by far not the only company in this sector (others being Microsoft, Google, Apple, Amazon, Twitter, TikTok, etc.) and each presents its unique view of the world via corporate policy communications. For instance, in an early pilot for this study, CDA revealed

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that the platform TikTok places greater emphasis on issues of ‘community’ and ‘respect’ than Meta. Other areas may yield similarly fascinating results. Moreover, this study explicitly only considers policy documents provided directly from Meta itself—how Meta conducts itself elsewhere (i.e., policy responses, news articles) may show a different construction of the social contract than in these texts. In any case, given the importance of this industry and the pace at which governments are working to regulate this area, there is no lack of avenues for future inquiry and academic consideration. Much remains unknown and knowledge of corporate intent in this sector presents enormous significance for academics and policymakers alike in working to shape future regulatory regimes for the internet in a manner that promotes human rights and existing democratic principles. Whether the platforms themselves are partners or adversaries in building these regulatory regimes for the internet should remain at the forefront of policy considerations in the years to come.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I

Selection of Meta Policy Documents Used in the Computer-Assisted Text Analysis (1-50 / 475 instances):

##	Meta URLs	Date	Title	Policy Area 1	Policy Area 2	Policy Area 3
1	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/12/taking-legal-action-against-phishing-attacks/	2021/12	Taking Legal Action Against Phishing Attacks	Data & Privacy		
2	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/12/privacy-conversations-community-and-the-metaverse/	2021/12	Privacy Conversations Community And The Metaverse	Data & Privacy		
3	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/12/taking-action-against-surveillance-for-hire/	2021/12	Taking Action Against Surveillance For Hire	Data & Privacy		
4	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/12/expanding-bug-bounty-program-to-address-scraping/	2021/12	Expanding Bug Bounty Program To Address Scraping	Data & Privacy		
5	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/12/whatsapp-default-disappearing-messages-multiple-durations/	2021/12	Whatsapp Default Disappearing Messages Multiple Durations	Data & Privacy		
6	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/12/changes-to-news-feed-in-2021/	2021/12	Changes To News Feed In 2021	Safety & Expression		
7	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/12/metasp-new-ai-system-tackles-harmful-content/	2021/12	Metas New Ai System Tackles Harmful Content	Safety & Expression		
8	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/12/new-teen-safety-tools-on-instagram/	2021/12	New Teen Safety Tools On Instagram	Safety & Expression		
9	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/12/expanding-facebook-protect-to-more-countries/	2021/12	Expanding Facebook Protect To More Countries	Data & Privacy	Safety & Expression	
10	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/12/strengthening-efforts-against-spread-of-non-consensual-intimate-images/	2021/12	Strengthening Efforts Against Spread Of Non Consensual Intimate Images	Data & Privacy	Safety & Expression	
11	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/12/metasp-approach-to-safer-private-messaging/	2021/12	Metas Approach To Safer Private Messaging	Data & Privacy	Safety & Expression	

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	safer-private-messaging/							
12	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/12/metas-human-rights-work-philippines/	2021/12	Metas Human Rights Work Philippines		Misinformation		Safety & Expression	
13	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/11/update-on-ethiopia/	2021/11	Update On Ethiopia			Safety & Expression	Misinformation	
14	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/11/our-commitment-to-combating-climate-change/	2021/11	Our Commitment To Combating Climate Change		Misinformation			
15	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/11/inclusive-products-through-race-data-measurement/	2021/11	Inclusive Products Through Race Data Measurement		Data & Privacy		Safety & Expression	
16	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/11/meta-transparency-report-h1-2021/	2021/11	Meta Transparency Report H1 2021		Data & Privacy			
17	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/11/civil-rights-audit-progress-report/	2021/11	Civil Rights Audit Progress Report			Safety & Expression		
18	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/11/community-standards-enforcement-report-q3-2021/	2021/11	Community Standards Enforcement Report Q3 2021			Safety & Expression		
19	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/11/facebook-widely-viewed-content-report-q3-2021/	2021/11	Facebook Widely Viewed Content Report Q3 2021			Safety & Expression		
20	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/11/safe-experiences-is-best-for-our-business/	2021/11	Safe Experiences Is Best For Our Business			Safety & Expression		
21	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/11/how-meta-addresses-bullying-harassment/	2021/11	How Meta Addresses Bullying Harassment			Safety & Expression		
22	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/11/update-on-use-of-face-recognition/	2021/11	Update On Use Of Face Recognition			Data & Privacy		
23	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/10/privacy-conversations-ai-governance-with-danilo-doneda/	2021/10	Privacy Conversations Ai Governance With Danilo Doneda		Data & Privacy			
24	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/10/hate-speech-prevalence-dropped-facebook/	2021/10	Hate Speech Prevalence Dropped Facebook			Safety & Expression		

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25	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/10/advancing-online-bullying-harassment-policies/	2021/10	Advancing Online Bullying Harassment Policies	Safety & Expression
26	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/10/protecting-us-2020-elections-inauguration-day/	2021/10	Protecting Us 2020 Elections Inauguration Day	Safety & Election Integrity
27	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/10/approach-to-countries-at-risk/	2021/10	Approach To Countries At Risk	Safety & Misinformation
28	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/09/our-progress-addressing-challenges-and-innovating-responsibly/	2021/09	Our Progress Addressing Challenges And Innovating Responsibly	Safety & Misinformation
29	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/09/what-the-wall-street-journal-got-wrong/	2021/09	What The Wall Street Journal Got Wrong	Safety & Misinformation
30	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/09/tackling-climate-change-together/	2021/09	Tackling Climate Change Together	Misinformation
31	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/09/explaining-research-to-support-families/	2021/09	Explaining Research To Support Families	Safety & Expression
32	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/09/pausing-instagram-kids-building-parental-supervision-tools/	2021/09	Pausing Instagram Kids Building Parental Supervision Tools	Safety & Expression
33	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/09/research-teen-well-being-and-instagram/	2021/09	Research Teen Well Being And Instagram	Safety & Expression
34	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/09/creating-hope-through-action-for-suicide-prevention-and-awareness/	2021/09	Creating Hope Through Action For Suicide Prevention And Awareness	Safety & Expression
35	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/09/updating-our-cookie-controls-in-europe/	2021/09	Updating Our Cookie Controls In Europe	Data & Privacy
36	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/09/independent-privacy-assessment/	2021/09	Independent Privacy Assessment	Data & Privacy
37	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/08/privacy-enhancing-technologies-and-ads/	2021/08	Privacy Enhancing Technologies And Ads	Data & Privacy

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38	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/08/improving-user-experience-in-our-transfer-your-information-tool/	2021/08	Improving User Experience In Our Transfer Your Information Tool	Data & Privacy
39	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/08/privacy-conversations-the-future-of-privacy-and-consent-with-stanford-universitys-dr-jennifer-king/	2021/08	Privacy Conversations The Future Of Privacy And Consent With Stanford Universitys Dr Jennifer King	Data & Privacy
40	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/08/research-cannot-be-the-justification-for-compromising-peoples-privacy/	2021/08	Research Cannot Be The Justification For Compromising Peoples Privacy	Data & Privacy
41	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/08/asking-people-for-their-birthday-on-instagram/	2021/08	Asking People For Their Birthday On Instagram	Safety & Expression
42	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/08/widely-viewed-content-report/	2021/08	Widely Viewed Content Report	Safety & Expression
43	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/08/community-standards-enforcement-report-q2-2021/	2021/08	Community Standards Enforcement Report Q2 2021	Safety & Expression Misinformation
44	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/08/taking-action-against-vaccine-misinformation-superspreaders/	2021/08	Taking Action Against Vaccine Misinformation Superspreaders	Safety & Expression Misinformation
45	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/07/support-for-covid-19-vaccines-is-high-on-facebook-and-growing/	2021/07	Support For Covid 19 Vaccines Is High On Facebook And Growing	Misinformation
46	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/07/increasing-diversity-in-innovation/	2021/07	Increasing Diversity In Innovation	Diversity & Inclusion
47	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/07/facebook-diversity-report-2021/	2021/07	Facebook Diversity Report 2021	Diversity & Inclusion
48	https://about.fb.com/news/2020/06/meeting-unique-elections-challenges/	2020/06	Meeting Unique Elections Challenges	Safety & Expression Election Integrity
49	https://about.fb.com/news/2020/06/voting-information-center/	2020/06	Voting Information Center	Election Integrity

50	https://about.fb.com/news/2021/06/how-facebook-is-preparing-for-ethiopias-2021-general-election/	2021/06	How Facebook Is Preparing For Ethiopias 2021 General Election	Misinformation	Election Integrity
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Appendix II

Document 1

Title: **Big Tech Needs More Regulation**

Author: Mark Zuckerberg, Founder and Chief Executive Officer

Date: February 18, 2020

<https://about.fb.com/news/2020/02/big-tech-needs-more-regulation/>

Document 2:

Title: **Understanding Facebook's Business Model**

Author: Mark Zuckerberg, Founder and Chief Executive Officer

Date: January 24, 2019

<https://about.fb.com/news/2019/01/understanding-facebooks-business-model/>

Document 3:

Title: **Facebook Does Not Benefit from Hate**

Author: Nick Clegg, VP of Global Affairs and Communications

Date: July 1, 2020

<https://about.fb.com/news/2020/07/facebook-does-not-benefit-from-hate/>

Document 4:

Title: **Taking More Steps To Keep The People Who Use Instagram Safe**

Author: Adam Mosseri, Head of Instagram

Date: October 27, 2019

<https://about.fb.com/news/2019/10/taking-more-steps-to-keep-the-people-who-use-instagram-safe/>

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Appendix III

Top Terms in Corpus with frequency (n>50):

Item	Frequency
social medium	274
hate speech	272
news feed	256
community standards	207
fake account	178
human right	155
inauthentic behavior	134
political ad	132
false news	129
coordinated inauthentic behavior	116
law enforcement	106
piece of content	103
instagram account	102
harmful content	101
bad actor	101
oversight board	94
civil society	86
new product	84
civil right	80

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facebook account	77
data portability	75
new feature	69
free expression	68
transparency report	67
violating content	66
covid-19 vaccine	65
general election	64
privacy setting	63
fake news	61
artificial intelligence	61
new tool	59
content reviewer	57
issue ad	57
other company	56
starting today	55
proactive detection	54
suicide prevention	54
public figure	53
sharing metric	52
face recognition	51

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facebook group	51
next question	50

Appendix IV

Selection of Statements including 'Responsible' (1-10 / 62 instances):

 : Important Context

# Left	KWIC	Right
1 Supplier Diversity, ensures that our supply chain, from cafe produce to data center construction and global event production, is both diverse and inclusive. Our design choices are important, too. Designing for inclusivity leads to better decisions and better products. Ian, Director of Design at Instagram, has relied on diverse teams to build the best products throughout his career in the US and now in Japan. It's also vital to be increasingly intentional not just about what we design, but how. We are committed to ethical design and	responsible	innovation in tech. Margaret, VP of Product Design, insists on diverse perspectives and a broad view of social and political contexts informing how we design. These people, their work, and our work as a company, are making a difference. Facebook Resource Groups are building community and supporting professional development while programs like Managing Bias, Managing Inclusion, Be the Ally Circles, Managing a Respectful Workplace, and Efficacy Training build everyone's skills. Today, there are more people of diverse backgrounds and experiences, more people of color,
2 progress this summer. This is by no means comprehensive, and we have a lot more to do, but I'm going to share regular updates so our community knows that this work is important and ongoing. New Equity Team To ensure this work is fully supported, we've created a dedicated product group – the Instagram Equity team – that will focus on better understanding and addressing bias in	Responsible	AI team to ensure algorithmic fairness. In addition, they'll create new features that respond to the needs of underserved communities. Separate from this new product group, we're also hiring a new Director of Diversity and Inclusion for Instagram who will help advance Instagram's goal of finding, keeping and growing more diverse talent. Harassment

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<p>our product development and people's experiences on Instagram. The Equity team will focus on creating fair and equitable products. This includes working with our</p>		<p>and Hate We've developed and updated a number of our company policies to support communities worldwide. We updated our policies to more specifically account for certain kinds of implicit hate speech, such as content depicting blackface</p>
<p>3 activists are divided over numerous issues, including the goal of a civil conflict, racism and anti-Semitism, and whether to instigate violent conflict or be prepared to react when it occurs. We noted that some people who participated at the Gun Rights Rally that took place in Richmond, VA on January 20, 2020, wore the outfit now typical for boogaloo adherents and we have since tracked the movement's expansion as participants engage at various protests and rallies across the country. More recently, officials have identified violent adherents to the movement as those</p>	<p>responsible</p>	<p>for several attacks over the past few months. These acts of real-world violence and our investigations into them are what led us to identify and designate this distinct network. In order to make Facebook as inhospitable to this violent US-based anti-government network as possible, we conducted a strategic network disruption of their presence today removing 220 Facebook accounts, 95 Instagram accounts, 28 Pages and 106 groups that currently comprise the network. We have also removed over 400 additional groups and over 100 other Pages for violating our Dangerous Individuals and</p>
<p>4 while protecting people's privacy, including through the US-based pilot to provide researchers with access to more than 1.65 million social issue, electoral and political ads that ran during the three-month period prior to Election Day. Building Products with Civil Rights in Mind The Civil Rights Team embarked on developing a civil rights review process across Meta technologies called Project Height. This process will provide an analysis framework for product teams to assess potential civil rights concerns presented in new product launches. The Civil Rights Team partners with the</p>	<p>Responsible</p>	<p>AI team, and other people on the development and use of AI at Meta, to bolster the five key pillars Responsible AI has outlined in Meta's efforts to build AI responsibly. Machine learning models are a significant tool in Meta's content moderation work and we are always working to improve the development and use of models across our technologies. Meta cannot resolve potential differences in user's experiences across groups if we don't understand the demographics of our community. The company, led by our Civil Rights and Responsible AI teams, is working</p>

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<p>5 more than 1.65 million social issue, electoral and political ads that ran during the three-month period prior to Election Day. Building Products with Civil Rights in Mind The Civil Rights Team embarked on developing a civil rights review process across Meta technologies called Project Height. This process will provide an analysis framework for product teams to assess potential civil rights concerns presented in new product launches. The Civil Rights Team partners with the Responsible AI team, and other people on the development and use of AI at Meta, to bolster the five key pillars</p>	<p>Responsible</p>	<p>AI has outlined in Meta's efforts to build AI responsibly. Machine learning models are a significant tool in Meta's content moderation work and we are always working to improve the development and use of models across our technologies. Meta cannot resolve potential differences in user's experiences across groups if we don't understand the demographics of our community. The company, led by our Civil Rights and Responsible AI teams, is working to better understand whether the experiences of our users differ across race, while preserving their privacy. Our long-term goal is to</p>
<p>6 Rights Team partners with the Responsible AI team, and other people on the development and use of AI at Meta, to bolster the five key pillars Responsible AI has outlined in Meta's efforts to build AI responsibly. Machine learning models are a significant tool in Meta's content moderation work and we are always working to improve the development and use of models across our technologies. Meta cannot resolve potential differences in user's experiences across groups if we don't understand the demographics of our community. The company, led by our Civil Rights and</p>	<p>Responsible</p>	<p>AI teams, is working to better understand whether the experiences of our users differ across race, while preserving their privacy. Our long-term goal is to better understand people's experiences across all protected characteristics and groups. You can read more about this here. To become a better company, we have to meaningfully engage in how we can strengthen and advance civil rights at every level, and we remain committed to doing this industry-leading work. Related News We're publishing EY's independent findings of the Community Standards Enforcement Report metrics. May 17,</p>
<p>7 and off Facebook through cookies. Learn more, including about available controls: Cookies Policy Submitting Comments on Data Sharing for Social Science Research December 21, 2020 December 18, 2020 Today, we submitted</p>	<p>responsible</p>	<p>data sharing, including data on digital platforms, for social science research purposes. You can read our comments here. With our comments, we hope to provide insight into some of the challenges we've encountered and potential</p>

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<p>comments to the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) in response to its November 24th call for comments regarding Access to Data Held by Digital Platforms for the Purposes of Social Scientific Research.</p> <p>EDMO plans to form a working group in 2021 to develop a Code of Conduct under Article 40 of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to facilitate</p>		<p>solutions for sharing data for the purpose of social science research in a way that protects people's privacy.</p> <p>We believe in the power of data to solve some of the world's greatest challenges and we want to enable the important work of independent social scientists while continuing to protect people's privacy.</p> <p>We are particularly interested in EDMO's</p>
<p>8 appeal our decisions on individual posts so you can ask for a second opinion when you think we've made a mistake.</p> <p>We decided to publish these internal guidelines for two reasons.</p> <p>First, the guidelines will help people understand where we draw the line on nuanced issues.</p> <p>Second, providing these details makes it easier for everyone, including experts in different fields, to give us feedback so that we can improve the guidelines – and the decisions we make – over time.</p> <p>The Policy Development Process</p> <p>The content policy team at Facebook is</p>	<p>responsible</p>	<p>for developing our Community Standards.</p> <p>We have people in 11 offices around the world, including subject matter experts on issues such as hate speech, child safety and terrorism.</p> <p>Many of us have worked on the issues of expression and safety long before coming to Facebook.</p> <p>I worked on everything from child safety to counter terrorism during my years as a criminal prosecutor, and other team members include a former rape crisis counselor, an academic who has spent her career studying hate organizations, a human rights lawyer, and a teacher.</p> <p>Every</p>
<p>9 extremist organizations, former law enforcement and other public servants, and academics.</p> <p>As part of this process, we seek input from people outside Facebook so we can better understand multiple perspectives on safety and expression, as well as the impact of our policies on different communities.</p> <p>Last month we started publishing minutes from these meetings, and early next year we plan to include a change log so that people can track updates to our Community Standards over time.</p> <p>The people enforcing our</p>	<p>responsible</p>	<p>for safety on Facebook is made up of around 30,000 people, about 15,000 of whom are content reviewers around the world, as the Times updated its story to note.</p> <p>Contrary to what the story reports, content reviewers don't have quotas for the amount of reports they have to complete.</p> <p>Reviewers' compensation is not based on the amount of content they review, and our reviewers aren't expected to rely on Google Translate as they are supplied with training and supporting resources.</p> <p>We hire reviewers for their</p>

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<p>policies are focused on accuracy, not quotas. </s><s> The team</p>		<p>language expertise and cultural context –</p>
<p>10 <s> We also identified some overlap with the Iranian accounts and Pages we removed in August. </s><s> Our threat intelligence team first detected this activity one week ago. </s><s> Given the elections, we took action as soon as we'd completed our initial investigation and shared the information with US and UK government officials, US law enforcement, Congress, other technology companies and the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab. </s><s> However, it's still early days and while we have found no ties to the Iranian government, we can't say for sure who is</p>	<p>responsible</p>	<p>. </s><s> Presence on Facebook and Instagram: 30 Pages, 33 Facebook accounts, and 3 Groups on Facebook, as well as 16 accounts on Instagram. </s><s> Followers: About 1.02 million accounts followed at least one of these Pages, about 25,000 accounts joined at least one of these Groups, and more than 28,000 accounts followed at least one of these Instagram accounts. </s><s> Advertising: Less than \$100 in spending for ads on Facebook and Instagram across two ads paid for in US and Canadian dollars. </s><s> The first ad ran in June 2016,</p>

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Appendix V

Selection of Words Denoting Platform Actions and Their Objects:

Keyword	Collocate	Frequency
detect		95
	content	15
	type	7
	activity	6
	fraud	4
	speech	4
	behavior	4
	account	4
	pattern	3
	violation	3
	kind	3
	video	3
	post	3
	majority	2
	nudity	2

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	attempt	2
	text	2
	abuse	2
ensure		127
	people	15
	privacy	6
	integrity	4
	everyone	4
	compliance	3
	system	3
	Facebook	3
	content	3
	treatment	2
	independence	2
	good	2
	effectiveness	2
	creator	2
	board	2
	candidate	2
	woman	2
	Pages	2

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	app	2
	decision	2
	group	2
	work	2
	product	2
	account	2
	datum	2
	experience	2
combat		101
	misinformation	18
	hate	9
	interference	8
	terrorism	6
	speech	5
	abuse	4
	change	4
	content	4
	COVID-19	3
	spread	3
	impersonation	2
	pandemic	2

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	form	2
	technique	2
	actor	2
	people	2
protect		341
	people	50
	privacy	45
	election	35
	range	21
	integrity	18
	information	17
	datum	16
	community	12
	right	9
	user	9
	account	9
	security	6
	expression	5
	platform	5
	kid	4
	candidate	4

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child	4
athlete	3
figure	3
US	3
freedom	3
teen	3
Census	2
characteristic	2
protest	2
group	2
content	2

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ISSN: 1474-1938/1946