

Youth Select Committee

Oral evidence: Body Image

Friday 7 July 2017

Watch the meeting

Members present: Thomas Copeland (Chair); Becca Moore (Vice-Chair); Alizeh Abdul Rahman; Michael Bryan; Emma Curran; Oscar Daniel; Zacchaeus Hayward; Aisha Malik-Smith; Samuel Pidgeon; Alex Robertson; Yasmin-Jade Sides.

Questions 43-111

Witnesses

I: Danny Bowman, Chidera Eggerue ("The Slumflower" blog), **Harnaam Kaur** (Instagram), **Bethany Rutter** ("Arched Eyebrow" blog) and **Stephanie Yeboah** ("Nerd About Town" blog).

II: Karim Palant, Public Policy Manager UK, Facebook and Instagram.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Danny Bowman, Chidera Eggerue, Harnaam Kaur, Bethany Rutter and Stephanie Yeboah.

Q43 Chair: Good afternoon. I am Thomas Copeland, Chair of the Youth Select Committee. I welcome everyone here today to the third panel of witnesses in the oral evidence sessions for the Committee's inquiry on body image. This topical issue was chosen after almost 1 million young people voted it one of their top 10 issues in the UK Youth Parliament's Make Your Mark ballot in 2016.

The specific areas that we plan to look into today are awareness, education, services provided, social media and stigma in relation to body image. We have received more than 70 pieces of evidence, and we are really looking forward to what you can contribute and how you can help us to improve our report.

Will everyone please ensure that their mobile phone is switched to silent and that no video or photography takes place during the session? The session is being recorded and will be available to view online at parliamentlive.tv. You can follow us today on the hashtag #youthselect. I apologise for the heat. For one brief moment, we had a fan, but unfortunately that is not now possible, so we have propped open the doors and are doing everything we can.

Before we begin, I thank all our witnesses for coming today and giving up their time to speak with us. I now invite the witnesses to introduce themselves and give a brief overview of their role.

Danny Bowman: I'm Danny Bowman. I am the mental health spokesperson for Parliament Street. I was also the world's first selfie addict.

Harnaam Kaur: My name is Harnaam Kaur. I am a body-confidence advocate and the owner of an up-and-coming brand called Treasures Within.

Stephanie Yeboah: My name is Stephanie Yeboah. I am a plus-size style blogger and fat-positivity activist.

Bethany Rutter: My name is Bethany Rutter. I, too, am a plus-size fashion blogger. I also work at a plus-size fashion brand and have designed plus-size clothes. I am a journalist, and I do a podcast and cover all kinds of body and fat-positive stuff.

Chidera Eggerue: Hello, I'm Chidera. I am a presenter with the MOBO awards. I am the creative director of a vacation rental company called Inclusive. I am also a fashion blogger and focus entirely on encouraging



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young women of colour to take charge of their identities. Twitter is the main platform that I use to convey my messages.

- Q44 **Chair:** Thank you. The first question is a nice broad one to the whole panel. Why did you decide to start campaigning on body image, and why did you decide to use the social media channels that you did in order to communicate with the public?

Danny Bowman: What is really important, and why I started campaigning on this, is that I see so many young people who are really suffering online, whether because they are being taunted or bullied online, or because they are being body shamed online. I have had my own experience of struggling online, with different levels of bullying. That led to a mental health, body image problem. So I have seen a wide variety of risks online, and I think these things need to be addressed. I think they need to be looked at head-on, and that is why I campaign on this.

- Q45 **Chair:** And the channels that you decide to use?

Danny Bowman: I use Twitter and Facebook.

- Q46 **Chair:** Is there any particular reason for that?

Danny Bowman: With Twitter, you can reach a lot of different people, from a lot of different backgrounds. I use Facebook just because I had it before.

Harnaam Kaur: I am obviously a woman who looks very different in society, so when I started talking about my own personal journey of being bullied and body-shamed, my story went absolutely viral. Being an advocate is something that I fell into, because a lot of women, men and especially young people connected to my story. I saw something in it—I saw that body-shaming and bullying are something universal that everyone goes through, so I decided to use my voice to help empower people of all different ages and backgrounds. The main social media I use are Facebook and Instagram. I have a lot of following on Instagram, so that is probably one of the main channels that I use to speak to people.

Stephanie Yeboah: Growing up in the '90s with an unconventional body type that was not deemed socially acceptable was always very difficult for me and for other kids like me growing up, especially when we did not have somebody to look up to or somebody in the media that looked like me. When I got to the point where I discovered body positivity and loving myself, I made a conscious effort to talk to people who are or were in my situation—young girls who are perhaps feeling a certain way and who do not feel that there is somebody like them who represents them in the media and en masse everywhere else. That is one of the main reasons I decided to start really focusing on body image, diversity in body image and things of that nature. I predominantly use Twitter and Instagram, just because that is where my reach is. I have a greater reach on those platforms, and I think a lot of people tend to take on me there.

Bethany Rutter: I see social media and my place in it as a way to plug the gap that is not being met by mainstream media. I feel like a lot of how



we talk about social media and body image is very negative—it encourages poor self-image—but for people like Steph and me who, as Steph said, are not receiving positive images in mainstream media, it is a way to represent yourself and see people like you being represented. I wanted to be a part of that. I use Twitter and Instagram: Instagram for pictures, but Twitter to talk about this stuff. If I see a bad news story or something that I think is not really doing much good, Twitter is a really good place to be able to react and say, “Actually, this isn’t true” or “There is another perspective on this”. That can reach a lot of people. I fundamentally think social media is a good thing for body image.

Chidera Eggerue: With social media, I think it is really easy to get lost in the likes. What I mean by that is that you can get carried away by the validation that you get online. I am someone who does get a lot of online validation, and I started to feel a bit uncomfortable with that, because I realised that people valued the idea of me as opposed to my reality.

I have a condition called traction alopecia, which basically means that my hair is not going to grow back, because I have been doing a lot of heavy extensions on it since I was about five and using relaxer—basically putting chemicals in my hair to make it straight—from when I was a child to when I was 19. It damaged and killed my hair follicles, so the hair is not going to grow back. I realised that there is a lot of shame attached to hair loss, especially in the black community, and that was when I noticed that it is important that I use the platform that I have to raise awareness of it.

I got a very interesting response, because I am a woman who gets a lot of comments like “Wow, you’re so pretty”, “You look so nice” and “I love your style”, but now people see, “Wow, she’s dealing with a bald patch”. A bald patch is seen as a really funny thing and people make fun of that. People run away from talking about it, so I realised, “Okay, it’s time for me to just write a paragraph talking about what traction alopecia is.”

I realised then that social media is incredibly important for raising awareness of stuff. I have noticed that things can go viral really easily, but also that it is always the negative things that go viral more quickly. That was when I decided to take charge of the authority that I have on social media and put across that message. That is what I basically do—a lot of posting photos of myself looking really cool and nice, but also looking a way that most people would be scared to post themselves looking, because we are all human and we all have a very crappy side to us.

Q47 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Could we also have a brief comment about your audience?

Danny Bowman: The majority of my audience has to do with politics—mental health professionals who tend to focus on that, specifically around body image. There are a lot of mental illnesses where social media is really detrimental. It doesn’t make them happen, but there are a lot of negative sides to social media, especially with body image disorders such as body dysmorphic disorder, anorexia and bulimia. That is generally why I have an audience of mental health professionals.



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Harnaam Kaur: My audience is mainly women who also suffer from polycystic ovaries, which is the condition I suffer with. It is basically an imbalance of hormones, and there are a lot of women—one in five—who suffer from it. I like to reach out to men as well, because men go through a lot of body image issues that we do not really talk about, but it is generally women who are body-shamed or bullied because of the condition that they have and is similar to mine.

Stephanie Yeboah: My main audience is predominantly women as well. A lot of plus-size women between the ages of perhaps 16 and about 40, and specifically within that a lot of black women who are plus-size, follow me.

Bethany Rutter: Late teens upwards, generally plus-size women and some queer community engagement.

Chidera Eggerue: The majority of my audience are young black women from about 14 years old up to their early 30s all recovering from some sort of emotional trauma, because I speak a lot about that. These are women who are also very stylish and care a lot about taking charge of their identity.

Q48 **Zacchaeus Hayward:** Danny, you have spoken in the past about your own struggles with body image. What do you think are the specific challenges relating to body image faced by young men? You have touched on this a little already, but would you care to expand on it?

Danny Bowman: Definitely. Just to focus in on a particular social media outlet, I think that Instagram is becoming more detrimental, especially to young men. You go on Instagram and see six-packs left, right and centre. You see a lot of the same body type. I think that a lot of men are looking at that and thinking, "Hold on. These guys are getting huge amounts of likes. They are getting a lot of validation. I need to look like that. If I don't look like that, I won't be successful." It translates into the idea of success and failure. A lot of young men are looking at these sorts of images and feeling inadequate. They are feeling like they are not good enough and are a failure. That is spanning on to mental health problems and, on top of that, steroid abuse and different things. I think we have to look at what it represents to a lot of young men out there and what it says about our society. If we truly want to solve this problem, we are going to need to go directly to social media networks.

Q49 **Alizeh Abdul Rahman:** My question is for you, Harnaam. You have often discussed the stigma surrounding the specific appearance concerns affecting people like yourself. What do you think should be done to address the stigma?

Harnaam Kaur: I think that education about people who are diverse is very important, especially if we start in primary schools and talk to children about the fact that everybody has a different body from one another. I think that education from a very young age is important because I feel that, if the people around me were educated about me, why I am different and my condition, bullying or body shaming wouldn't be there. I work as an anti-bullying advocate and a body confidence



advocate. I feel that, if the bullying wasn't there, people would maybe feel a lot more confident in who they are, and if people were a lot more confident in who they are, the bullying would not affect them in the ways that it does now. I truly believe that even sex education should be taught at an earlier level. It does not have to be about the birds and the bees, but just about bodies, respect for your own body and other people's bodies and what certain things on your body are. The diversity of bodies should be taught at an earlier stage.

Q50 Yasmin-Jade Sides: I'm Yasmin. Thanks for all being here. This is to Stephanie, Chidera and Harnaam. What specific challenges around body image do young people of colour face, and does the body positivity movement need to do more to promote people of colour?

Stephanie Yeboah: Yes, definitely. The main issue that people of colour face within body positivity is the lack of representation. For some reason there seems to be a sense of, I guess from my point of view, erasure. For the longest time we have subscribed to this westernised standard of beauty, which is predominantly Caucasian, slim, very pretty, that sort of thing. Even though we have body positivity and we have had a body positive revolution going on, it still seems to be that there are certain demographics still being omitted from the body positivity community.

When we look at models, I find it difficult sometimes to find models of colour. There are lots of Asian and black plus-size models, especially in the UK. Definitely more needs to be done so that people out there can find themselves represented within the media so that they can begin to feel more confident about their bodies and to say, "You know what? I'm fat or I'm plus-size and I am black and I am being represented, so therefore I feel like I matter. It's not just one race or a specific body type that is being represented. The fact that somebody of my colour is actually being seen on TV means that people do care about plus-size women of colour as well, so therefore I matter." We definitely need to see more of that within society.

Harnaam Kaur: Could you repeat your question?

Q51 Yasmin-Jade Sides: What specific challenges around body image do young people of colour face, and does the body positivity movement need to do more to promote people of colour?

Harnaam Kaur: 100%. I feel that, just like Stephanie was saying, people of colour are being under-emphasised or under-represented. Even people like me who wear turbans or who have beards, I don't see them in any campaigns. People that look like me might feel marginalised: are we not being included in our society? Are we outcasts? I had to make a stand. That is why Instagram is important for me to do photo-shoots and show people it's okay to look different. But I also feel that companies need to be able to open up their doors to people that look different and they need to stop photoshopping images. You need to realise that these images that are portrayed on the internet are not real images. They have been photoshopped and altered. The way that women's and men's bodies are



portrayed is not in their natural form. That is what affects or hurts our youngsters' self-esteem.

If fashion designers, bloggers, photographers and make-up artists all collectively decided not to whitewash people of colour and lighten their skin, or not photoshop people and make a stand on it, that would be a revolutionary movement into allowing people to accept themselves, find self-love, embrace who they are and just be happy with themselves.

Chidera Eggerue: Expanding on Stephanie and Harnaam's point, a major issue within the little representation that black women have is fetishisation. There is a lot of melanin appreciation going on and I see brands jumping on to it, but I have noticed that black women are only seen as beautiful and acceptable when they are oiled up and barely clothed. That is an issue because we also have colourism within the black community where lighter skin is seen as more valuable than darker skin. In a lot of campaigns when there is a black woman, her hair is very curly and easy to brush through, her skin is light, so she is black but not too black. The issue with that is, again, if you are going to represent someone, why not just go all in and do it? It is definitely harder for brands to see products on a darker-skinned black woman because of the way the world views blackness. We have to educate people on the connotations of blackness. We would then have brands being able to have darker-skinned models and darker-skinned people in higher positions without people attaching negativity towards it. It just needs education.

Q52 **Emma Curran:** Hi, I'm Emma. Thank you for coming. My question is for Stephanie and Bethany. You two have both written about the idea of fatphobia. What do you mean by that, and what specific challenges do you think plus-sized people face online?

Bethany Rutter: I do not think it is too controversial to say that, culturally, we do not value and appreciate fat bodies. They are something we are culturally conditioned to be afraid of and to find not desirable. They are things that you should do everything in your power to not be or not to have. That is how I would define it.

Q53 **Emma Curran:** What specific challenges do you think plus-sized people face online?

Bethany Rutter: Online, I guess it is just the same as in the world. There is abuse. Any time you try to talk about something, it always has to come back to your weight. Stephanie and I like to write about clothes, and it would be really cool if we were just allowed to talk about clothes and didn't have to continually talk about our bodies and justify our existence—if we could say, "Yes, I am allowed to wear this thing," and we could just be seen as cool women wearing clothes.

It's just not a level playing field when it comes to body image. It is all part of the same thing. Even within the black community, it is not a level playing field, in terms of body size. It is a sliding scale of who is subjected to what kind of badness. That, for me, is the key thing. I just wish I could talk about something other than my body, and that every day I didn't feel



the need to defend myself and defend women who look like me against all of this very exhausting emotional stuff that is thrown at you just because of the way you look.

Stephanie Yeboah: Yes, definitely. Building on what Bethany said, I think fatphobia is the policing of fat people's bodies for no particular reason other than the fact that people don't like the way we look. One of the main detriments we have to face as fat people is that we always have to apologise for being us. We have to apologise for existing, basically. Even if we're not doing anything wrong, we always have to justify and defend our bodies. No other body type has to do that. That is one thing that does become increasingly frustrating. Like Bethany said, a lot of the time it is online abuse, and people who have these faux concerns about our health, when it's got nothing to do with them. We see all of these little micro-aggressions even in brand advertising, where they will put things online about—

Chidera Eggerue: Beach body.

Stephanie Yeboah: Yes, the whole beach body thing that's going on at the moment. It is basically saying that you have to look a certain way to go to the beach, when you don't. You literally just have to have a body and a bikini or boxers to go on to the beach. It is negatively telling people that being fat is not the way to go. It is just so frustrating a lot of the time.

Bethany Rutter: I had a thought while you were speaking, which I am going to say now. You were talking about how you have to continually apologise for existing. I think part of that is, when you are in public, trying to make yourself physically smaller and less obtrusive. That is why the internet and social media is such a great place to exist, because it's a place that you define on your own terms. You can represent yourself however you want, and you can find a community of people who are consuming you, your content, your image and whatever you have to say on those terms. It's a place where you don't really have to apologise for existing in the same way, and you can just say, "This is what I'm about."

Q54 **Emma Curran:** We received lots of evidence that "fitspiration"—the idea that you have to be unrealistically thin to be healthy—is really a problem for the body image of plus-sized people. What are your thoughts on that? Do you agree?

Bethany Rutter: I exercise quite a lot. I should have gone to an exercise class today, but instead I'm here.

Emma Curran: We appreciate that.

Bethany Rutter: Thank you.

I think the problem is not with seeing people exercise or representing the fact that you do exercise; it's with all the negative connotations we have around exercise. If we decouple fitness and exercise from weight loss, if the world was not fatphobic, and if exercise and nutrition were not so



coded around weight loss and changing the way your body looks, everyone could participate in it in a much more joyful way. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with “fitspiration”.

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with “fitspiration”. There is something wrong with how that is always built around changing your body shape—that there is a desirable body shape and if you don’t have that body shape, you’re trash and you should go to the gym and change yourself. It is hard because it is asking everyone to start from such a way back position, when we are already way too far down the path of fatphobia and body fascism. That is my take on it.

Stephanie Yeboah: I completely agree with you. There is nothing wrong with “fitspiration” as it is, but when you include all of those little nuances about how being bigger is this, and the whole before and after things—“before you were disgusting and now you look amazing”—that is something I don’t agree with. People should just choose to be fit regardless of how they look and just try to live their best life without constantly being body-shamed about having to exercise or lose weight.

Bethany Rutter: Or forcing that on other people.

Harnaam Kaur: I totally agree with you guys. Everybody has a body; their body is not a flaw. There is nothing wrong with having a six-pack or being plus-sized, or being small or short. The problem comes when one body is being represented as the body to have. That is what social media does. That is what a lot of pictures on Instagram, in the media, in campaigns, advertisements, on TV, on billboards do—all that you can see is one type of body. That is when the problem comes. It is not wrong having that body; it is just that that is not the only body that is out there in the world. Not everyone can connect to that type of body.

Q55 **Emma Curran:** Lastly, to Bethany, you have written that health has become a stick with which to beat fat people. Do you want to elaborate on that?

Bethany Rutter: Whenever you are fat and exist on the internet—or in the world—it feels like you constantly have to justify and defend the fact that you are healthy: “Yeah, I’m fat, but I’m also healthy.” To me that is entirely irrelevant. I don’t think that culturally we should be encouraging health to be the benchmark on which someone deserves respect, because there are so many people for whom health is just not possible, such as chronic illness, long-term illness and disability. We are not a culture that treats ill people well, in terms of the dismantling of the NHS and so on.

To create that benchmark and to say, “We will respect you if you are fat as long as you are healthy,” is really nefarious. I also do not think it is true. I think that fat people will have to perform health and fitness but still not get any respect, because it is not about our health. It is about the fact that there is some kind of deep-rooted hatred of fat bodies—they are deviant, abnormal, whatever.



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I think getting tangled up in the health question is really dangerous for healthy and unhealthy people of all sizes.

Emma Curran: Thank you to all of you.

Q56 **Becca Moore:** Hi, I'm Becca. I am the vice-Chair of the Youth Select Committee. You have all talked about the positives and negatives of social media. Specifically, which particular social media platforms are more likely to promote negative or positive body image?

Chidera Eggerue: Definitely Instagram.

Danny Bowman: I completely agree. Instagram is probably the worst. You were talking before about #thinspiration and all of those different hashtags. It is actually really serious in the sense of what it is linked to. I keep going on about the mental illnesses that it is linked to. Because of societal matters around Instagram, there are a lot of images—I completely agree with both of you—of skinny models and six-packed men. I mean, I tried to get a six-pack, but I didn't survive a day at the gym, unfortunately.

It is really, really difficult. What we have to remember is that we have created a new world online. It is literally a new world to many people. The same rules apply as within society; it is replicated online. When you talk about people in society preferring people who are skinny or blonde—what society likes to paint as the perfect image—that is replicated online. There is a bigger picture of what we as a society can actually do, and I think that that needs to be replicated on these sites, as well as on Instagram—Instagram is the worst.

Q57 **Becca Moore:** Specifically which ones do you think are better for positive and which are better for negative—

Danny Bowman: In social media terms?

Becca Moore: In terms of actual platforms.

Danny Bowman: I am not very good at social media, but I would probably say that Twitter is very good, because it is quite informative, but I think that Instagram is definitely the worst and Facebook is somewhere in the middle.

Harnaam Kaur: I would say it is Instagram for both positive and negative, especially because there are so many images on Instagram. Millions and millions of people use it. I have also seen the hashtags being used. Young people or people in general who have a negative body image are using hashtags about self-harm and suicide. You can click on the hashtags and see people coping in such an unhealthy way. Instagram also has amazing advocates, too. Just by clicking on a hashtag about body positivity, you will see thousands of amazing advocates who have real experiences with being body-shamed and so on and how they have overcome it. There are negatives to Instagram, but there are hundreds of thousands of body-positive advocates on there, too.



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Stephanie Yeboah: Definitely. I was going to say what others have said. In terms of Instagram, there are negatives and positives. With Instagram, like Danny said, there is this whole different world that we have tapped into. It feels, especially for younger kids, that there is this desire to look a certain way. Everyone wants to look like their favourite reality stars—there is a certain beauty look that everyone wants to get, and it can be very damaging.

In the same vein, what is good with Instagram is that there are loads of body-positivity activists on there. You can curate your content so that you can have a feed full of positivity. For instance, with my Instagram feed, the majority of people I follow are body-positivity people and plus-size bloggers. Every time I look at my Instagram feed, I see loads of plus-size people looking amazing. You just have that positivity there. Instagram is definitely a tool that can be used for good, because you can curate your feed.

In terms of social media places that are good, I have sometimes found Facebook to be quite good, in the sense that there are loads of body-positivity communities and groups that you can join. Some of them are private groups, but I have found that there are lots of like-minded people on there. You can just discuss issues surrounding body image. People can post photos of themselves in a dress they really like, and they will get really lovely comments on it. When I began my body-positivity journey, it was through Facebook and joining body-positivity groups. Finding people who looked like me and were loving themselves helped me to progress on to Twitter and Instagram and things like that.

Bethany Rutter: No platform is specifically better or worse than any other; the only thing that makes them better or worse is the practical mechanisms that the social networks put in place to deal with things like abuse. For example, what happens when you block someone? Are they properly blocked or can they still see your profile? It is also things like what happens when someone has stolen a picture of you and uses it in a malicious way. That kind of thing is much more important than what is being discussed on platforms. I think that Twitter has failed in never efficiently developing a blocking system in however long it has been going. On Facebook, if you block someone, you never have to see them again. You basically do not know that they are there. However, Facebook does not deal well with someone using a picture of you for bad purposes. I know people that that has happened to. Everyone is on all social media now, so they are basically all thematically very similar, but things like dealing with abuse is a key item.

Becca Moore: It is more down to the social network—

Bethany Rutter: For me, that determines whether it feels like a safe place or not.

Chidera Eggerue: One of my biggest issues with social media platforms—especially Instagram—is that your value is often attached to how many likes you get. It is always a tempting feeling to delete pictures that did not



get that many likes, because maybe that is not as nice, or to think I do not look good because people did not like my photo. So you base your identity on what other people have told you that you are, and it can become very confusing for someone as young as 14, 15 who is still forming their identity and still learning who they are to rely on strangers or their friends to tell them who they are through likes and through comments. If you are being bullied on Instagram, that is a big deal. Like you were saying, there is not enough being done.

Literally on my way here, I was bullied on Instagram—this is the first time in like five years I have seen that. Someone has commented on my photo, talking about my boobs. I was like, “What the hell? This is so random—calling my boobs ‘flat boobs.’” I was like, “This is so weird—that people can land in your comments and leave abuse and then continue with their day.” That is really harmful for someone who isn’t as sure of themselves as I am. If I wasn’t sure of myself and wasn’t solidified in my identity, that would have really, really affected me, but I just got past it and said, “That person is acting out of the hate they have for themselves. I cannot internalise that.” But I think definitely the “likes” thing is the issue—it is the numbers. That is the issue.

Chair: Thank you very much. Can I ask everyone to be a little more concise, because we are under time constraints?

Q58 **Samuel Pidgeon:** Danny, you have previously spoken about your “selfie addiction.” How did your experiences on social media impact on your general wellbeing? What support did you receive for your addiction?

Danny Bowman: When I was 14, I used social media quite a lot. It was pretty much what has been said: I put photos of myself online to seek validation, really. Unfortunately, I didn’t get the comments that I wanted. There were a lot of mean comments about the way I looked, picking my appearance apart. Unfortunately, that led on to me starting to remove myself from social media and take photos on my own and spend six months house-bound.

At the time, there wasn’t a lot of support available—especially for men. I think this is quite a big issue. When it comes to body image, there is not a lot of support for men, and it is not treated with the same level of importance—I don’t think, anyway—as it is for a woman. At the time I was Newcastle-based, and I had to get support from Maudsley hospital in London for my illness. The support was fantastic when I got it, but there was a period of time that I had to wait, and when there was a lot of uncertainty about what it actually was. I think if I was a woman, there might have been a diagnosis readily available quicker, but that is simply speculation. That is what I think.

Q59 **Alex Robertson:** Hi, I’m Alex. Which online campaigns do you think have been the most effective in encouraging positive body image? What factors in those are effective?

Chidera Eggerue: I’m not going to lie, I haven’t seen many that have worked. They are very performative for me. I have seen that a lot of



brands do this whole, "Let's get a curvy women and put them there so that no one can say we don't include curvy women. Let's get a few black women in there so no one can say we didn't get black women." Then I am seeing this rainbow stuff all over Oxford Street with the LGBT stuff. Why I say that is because it is so performative for me. I think it is very, "Hey, look at me! I am a good person. Buy my stuff!" I don't think there is enough being done. If these brands really cared about what they claim to care about, they would make the effort to go to schools and set up posts there and really speak to people and involve people in the conversation rather than just talk at them about what they claim to care about. Does that make sense?

Q60 **Alex Robertson:** Do you think that is the problem, then? Does it need to be more—

Chidera Eggerue: I think it is. There needs to be a lot more action than just performing care.

Q61 **Chair:** Does anyone else have anything in particular to add on the hallmark of a successful campaign?

Stephanie Yeboah: I've got one. There was one really good campaign recently—I'm bigging up Bethany here. Navabi has been doing campaigns where they put plus-sized bloggers in mainstream fashion magazines like *Vogue*, *Elle* and *InStyle*. The whole premise is, "More plus please"—that is to say, we need more plus-sized people on the front covers of magazines and not just added as a token inside them. That has been amazing, because it is so wonderful to see people who look like your peers and you and who represent you on the front covers of magazines, looking amazing. It doesn't look out of place with any of the other magazines; it looks absolutely fantastic. I hope that magazines take the campaign into account and say, "Actually, we can have someone bigger than a size 10 on the front cover, and they can look amazing."

Bethany Rutter: That's where I work, so I didn't want to say it, but it is good.

Stephanie Yeboah: It's amazing.

Chair: Thanks very much.

Q62 **Alizeh Abdul Rahman:** My question is to you, Harnaam. You have been involved with the "EffYourBeautyStandards" campaign. What are the goals of that campaign, and how effective has it been so far?

Harnaam Kaur: I am not an admin any more, so that I can focus on my own brand, but when I was, collectively as a group we tried to portray as many different body types and cultures as we could. We forget about people who are disabled. I tried my best to find amputees who were willing to portray their bodies—I obviously asked permission to use their pictures—and people with vitiligo or who were shamed for having freckles. I tried to put pictures up of people who were diverse and who you wouldn't even think of. Who would think that disabled people could be body-positive as well? We don't think of things like that. As a campaign,



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they are growing beautifully and getting a lot of recognition. I know that each admin is doing their absolute best to portray an amazing body image.

- Q63 **Michael Bryan:** Thank you for your valuable insights. We have been exploring what mechanisms exist to deal with abuse. I would like to look at what responsibility social media companies have and what they can do about abuse.

Danny Bowman: I think it's time social media companies got a moral backbone. Unfortunately, they are letting this stuff happen, and nothing is happening on their end. Social media companies have a large responsibility to protect their users, but I also think the Government have a responsibility to have a moral backbone and say, "You know what? People are suffering online. We need to work together to solve this."

The individual has a role to play too, by keeping themselves safe online, but unless social media companies work with Government and with schools to get that information out there, nothing will change. There will still be horrendous situations online of people being bullied and intimidated, and people's body image being laughed at. That is awful, and social media companies need to sort out their moral compass, get off their backsides and do something.

- Q64 **Chair:** We will come on later to governmental actions, but in terms of practical suggestions for social media platforms and the responsibility they have, one example we had in our evidence was pop-up warnings of heavy usage.

Danny Bowman: They need to police better online. If you think of this place, every MP has a caseworker. Why doesn't every social media company have a caseworker watching people online or dealing with complaints from people online? If someone comes to them and says, "Listen, this person's bullying me online," "Someone's laughing at my image," or "Someone's portraying an image that is making me feel really distressed," the person from Facebook, Twitter or Instagram could say, "Okay, I'll take that down and deal with it." But that's just not happening.

- Q65 **Chair:** Okay, so what practical suggestions do you have?

Harnaam Kaur: I have seen that away from social media, websites in general have—it's hard to say, because when I was at my lowest point I was very suicidal and I was self-harming. You can easily find or search for websites that will help you to enjoy life. These same websites are then going viral on social media, and it makes me think "Does Facebook not also see these viral websites that are going around, that are being shared and clicked?" I also think, if a comment has been reported as abuse, Facebook needs to treat it as abuse and not come back and say "This comment does not abide by our guidelines," or "We don't find it offensive." I reported death threats and Facebook said things like "We don't think this contradicts our guidance"—something like that. I feel that if I am offended by a comment Facebook should acknowledge that and work on either shutting that account down or removing that comment.



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Stephanie Yeboah: I agree. I think in terms of blocking people and banning people, and even, if it has to come to it, muting abusive hashtags and things like that, steps need to be taken in order to do that. An example of that is, maybe earlier this year, when a movie came out and there was a lot of abuse against one of the actresses—a lot of racist abuse, a lot of sexist abuse, death threats. This lady was an A-list actress and it took maybe 10 days before Twitter did anything about it. If that can happen to her and Twitter is taking so long to act against absolutely terrible abuse, then for people like us who are just mere mortals on Twitter it is going to be even worse. So I think that, especially where Twitter and Instagram are concerned, they really need to be practical. Even if it means getting extra people to QC certain tweets or hire someone specifically to just block people, I think that is definitely a step in the right direction.

Bethany Rutter: Yes, comprehensive blocking: when someone is blocked they are blocked; they can't secretly stalk you somehow. I think given how much information social media companies collect on us it shouldn't be that hard to figure out what are vaguely trending topics or news stories that could have abusive comments and keep an eye on those—and remove things more willingly. I think those are my two takes.

Chidera Eggerue: Pretty much what everyone said. I agree.

Q66 **Oscar Daniel:** Do you believe that the Government has a responsibility to discourage the use of social media, the internet and communications platforms in ways which promote poor body image?

Chair: And what specific initiatives would you suggest? We will start with Danny.

Danny Bowman: Yes, the short answer is I do agree the Government has responsibility to work with social media companies. I think an initiative that could be used is some sort of positive body image campaign by the Government, alongside social media companies, which could support more knowledge, more evidence, more guidance on what images it is acceptable to share—what are acceptable images to put on social media. I think that would really help.

Q67 **Chair:** So, Government guidelines. And in terms of specific governmental initiatives that you would suggest—

Harnaam Kaur: I would like to talk about education. Right now I think it is year 5 and year 6 that get sex education, so I would really like sex education to be mandatory for younger years as well. It does not have to be like "This is how you create a baby," but just about their diversity of body and "This body looks different from this body", because children are sponges—what they hear is what they embrace. Also, puberty is mandatory—our bodies changing is mandatory—so why can't education on our bodies changing be mandatory too?

Stephanie Yeboah: I definitely think that education is a really big thing. The Government could do something in collaboration with social media to



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promote positive body image—going into schools and doing a half-hour workshop or teaching young adults to be safe online and, I guess, have the self-discovery of “I’m here, I matter, and it doesn’t matter what I look like or what people think about me online”—but just to remember that you are enough. If there could be workshops along that line, especially in primary school or year 7, that would be a really good initiative.

Bethany Rutter: The This Girl Can campaign has been extremely beneficial to the world; my specific idea would be to have a version of that that does not specifically focus on women in sport but focuses on the great diversity of human bodies. There are so many amazing British influencers who are diverse in terms of all oppressions. Something like that could be really powerful, because I see those ads everywhere—in real life; on TV; on social media.

Chidera Eggerue: I completely agree with what everyone has said.

Q68 **Chair:** I want to ask a broader question that we have asked some of our other panels today. Do you see any contradiction between campaigns advocating body satisfaction and body confidence, and those campaigning, for example, against obesity? Is there a contradiction there? Where does the balance lie?

Bethany Rutter: I am happy to begin—this is something I am very passionate about. There is obviously a conflict, but I do not agree with the terms of the question in general. The obesity crisis is largely a manufactured thing. We have been fed quite a lot of bad information. If diets worked, people would go on them once and then be thin for the rest of their lives. There is a reason that the diet industry is a £1 billion industry: because they don’t work.

Instead of trying to make people be a part of this process that is not long term, doesn’t work and can be detrimental to your health in the long term, it would probably be better for everyone and for what we spend money on if we focused more on a way of living more healthily in the body that you have. We also neglect the fact that the body that you have contains your brain, which is linked to your mental health, and that punishing yourself for years with dieting and bad body image is just as detrimental to your health as all the things that we are told obesity does to us. So I do not think that there is any conflict in that, and I think it is a more nuanced question. That is my answer.

Chidera Eggerue: There is this thing called Flat Tummy Tea, which is being promoted all over Instagram by bloggers who look like me. I’m quite slim, and I’m attractive according to Instagram’s idea of what attractive is. People like me sell Flat Tummy Tea. I don’t sell it, because I don’t agree with the idea of basically selling laxatives to teenagers and telling them, “If you want to have a snatched waist like Kylie Jenner and you can’t afford a waist trainer, buy our tummy tea and get 10% off with my code.” It is really harmful to promote health with a product that literally makes you unhealthy. It is so stupid.



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Bethany Rutter: We have become really obsessed with the physical idea of health and not really taken into account mental health, but we don't really fully comprehend physical health either, so it's all bad.

Q69 **Chair:** I know we have covered this in a few different lights, but just to finish, what is the most important thing that you consider we should be putting in our report to submit to the Government? If you could suggest one recommendation to change legislation or the way that policy works, what would that single recommendation be, in a practical sense?

Danny Bowman: Regarding the bigger picture, I would say the recommendation should be the implementation of a Minister for mental health.

Harnaam Kaur: I would like to go back to education. Schools have PSHE, but in that lesson, children should be taught about self-love, anti-bullying, diversity, the LGBT community, life skills, and dealing with depression and anxiety.

Stephanie Yeboah: Definitely the same thing: for body positivity to be taught in schools as a mandatory thing.

Bethany Rutter: I would say the recommendation should be this very controversial one: when a fat person goes to the doctor to seek medical help, they should not be told to lose weight; their condition should be treated.

Chidera Eggerue: In the same way that every school has a resident school nurse, there should be a resident therapist, and it should be mandatory for each child to visit to the therapist perhaps once a month.

Chair: Okay, perfect. Thank you very much for giving up some of your time today to come and speak to us. We really do appreciate it.

Examination of witness

Witness: Karim Palant.

Q70 **Chair:** Order. Good afternoon, I am Thomas Copeland, Chair of the Youth Select Committee. I welcome everyone to our fourth and final oral evidence session of the day in our Committee's inquiry into body image. This topical issue was chosen as a result of almost 1 million young people voting it as one of their top issues in the UK Youth Parliament's Make Your Mark ballot in 2016. I remind everyone to ensure that their mobile phone is switched on to silent and that no video or photographs should be taken during the session; the session is being recorded and will be available to view online via parliamentlive.tv, and you can also follow us on Twitter at [#youthselect](https://twitter.com/youthselect). I thank our witness for coming to speak to



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us and to give his insight, and I ask Mr Palant to introduce himself and to give a brief overview of his role.

Karim Palant: Thanks very much for inviting me, and I am really looking forward to this session. I think you guys are the experts on this, as this is your fourth session today, never mind any others that you might have had. I have not done this before, so this is new experience for me and I am looking forward to it.

My name is Karim Palant, and I am the public policy manager in the UK for Facebook. I cover all public policy issues that range from making sure that young people online are safe in the UK, and talking to policy makers about that, right through to dealing with the Home Office on some issues associated with terrorism, or dealing with the Department for Education on skills and how to ensure that we have the digital skills in the economy that we need to carry on growing, because Facebook is investing in the UK. We are growing from 1,000 people to 1,500 by the end of this year, and we want to make sure that people in the UK are able to take up those jobs and develop a career in digital. There is a wide range of things, which I am sure we will get into.

Q71 **Chair:** Thank you. What research have you done to understand the impact of Facebook and Instagram on young people's mental health, specifically in relation to the issue of body image?

Karim Palant: There is quite a lot of research out there. We have worked on some of it with the researchers, and quite a few articles were published in 2016 and I looked at those ahead of coming here; I am happy to send you the names of those individual researchers. One of the clear findings of that research is that being online and engaging with people and being in contact with friends, family and people who might share an interest brings really positive mental wellbeing outcomes for people. However, whether it be body image or other negative experiences, clearly for some young people some negatives come from that online experience. From our work with researchers, and our own work, the evidence shows that broadly speaking, it is really important to support young people to get the positives while dealing with the negatives, and to try to minimise those negatives in the best way possible. I think that is the overall conclusion that I would come to.

Q72 **Chair:** We will delve in to some of those issues a little bit more later on. You mentioned some of the research that you or your organisation have been part of. Have you worked, or would you consider working, with other social media platforms in order to create a broader set of research in the area of body image?

Karim Palant: Absolutely, yes. The UK has been really world-leading in some of this space with the UK Council for Child Internet Safety. One of the things that we do in the UK is bring together industry, NGOs and Government in a forum to talk about these issues. Lots of organisations that work with young people, such as the Diana Award, are involved in that and they will work on all kinds of issues. I have been involved in a working group on digital resilience, for example, which is about making



sure that people have the tools themselves to be able to take advantage of the positives online and to deal with the negatives: I understand what I need to do in order to share something positive about my life, or how to find out useful information that might help me in my academic life, but equally, if someone says something negative about me online, I know, first, how to separate that out from the real world and secondly how to respond to it, how to report it, if I want to report it, how to get it taken down or who to go to and talk to if I want to deal with it. Body image would be a classic area where we could work in that forum with other companies, Government, NGOs and young people like yourselves, to look at the research and work out what more we could do in that space. I think that would be a really important piece of work.

Q73 Alex Robertson: Hi, I'm Alex. It's great to have you here today. The recent RSPH report found that Instagram had the most negative score for overall impact on health and wellbeing and for body image. Why do you think that is the case?

Karim Palant: The first thing to say is that no one wants to see young people having a negative experience online. Everyone wants to work incredibly hard to make sure, and Instagram is absolutely committed to making sure, that the Instagram community is as positive a community as possible and that people go on there to have and share life-affirming experiences, to reach other people and to express themselves in new and interesting ways.

This is Pride weekend in London, so yesterday we launched in London, and I was there, the Instagram Pride wall, encouraging people to make kind comments—the hashtag is #kindcomments if anyone wants to use it—about each other, to help people express themselves and be themselves online. I think that is a really important thing to say.

On the research itself, the fact that Instagram stood out among that age group is, to some degree, a function of how many people in that age group, in that demographic, use Instagram. I think that was a little bit of what was going on there, but I have not studied the research in that much detail.

We don't hide from the fact that social media can, for some people, at some times in their lives, be a really difficult place. If you are having a difficult time of it in the real world, why would you suddenly find it easier online? Equally, if you need help and support and you are not finding it on social media, it is not going to help you. But we find that lots of people do find it and lots of people do connect, share and find ways to express themselves and reach out to other people. What we want to do is to make absolutely certain that the tools, policies and support are in place to ensure that those negatives are dealt with as best possible, as quickly as possible. That is a responsibility we feel really strongly, and we want to work with the experts, whether they be children's charities, academics or—to be honest, the real experts—you guys and your friends, your peers, who use these products every day. They are the main people we want to work with.



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Q74 **Samuel Pidgeon:** We have seen evidence suggesting a clear link between poor mental health in young people and social media platforms. Given this, should social media platforms be investing greater resources in research into this area, or educational campaigns?

Karim Palant: I will unpack your question, which is a really good one, into three separate points, if that's all right. First, what is the evidence? Secondly, should we be doing more to research and find out more? Thirdly, should we be doing more to educate and provide tools and resources to young people?

On the first point, about the evidence, I will write to you with the detailed studies and so on, but actually the academic evidence is really mixed on this. It is mixed because social media and the online world are very like the real world: there is good and bad, happy and sad, and all the things in-between. There are people who will find the online world really hard. I'm not going to sugar the pill on that; it is true. However, there are some people for whom it is really important. Groups on Facebook, for example, are a really important way in which people find meaningful connections with each other. Maybe they all have something in common. They might all be young people who have suffered a particular condition and want to get in contact with each other and share their experiences and provide support to each other; or they might be young people who are struggling with coming out.

A really interesting example that a colleague of mine found is in Utah. It is a set of mums and their kids. Utah is a very socially conservative place, generally speaking; I have never been, but that is what I am told. They are young men who have come out, and it is their mums who are getting together to say, "No matter how socially conservative an environment we're in, we're going to get together and share our experiences of having an out child, and we're all going to agree to go to the civil partnerships of each other's kids, even if everyone boycotts them." That is the positive.

I am conscious that you are worried I am rambling, Chair. Should we do more to educate and reach out? Yes, absolutely, definitely, 100%. We work with a range of organisations in the UK such as Childnet, the Diana Award's anti-bullying ambassadors and Internet Matters. We produce guides, including on safety and anti-bullying, and we have a Parents Portal, which is supposed to support parents to get their kids online safely—those kind of things are probably for younger kids.

We do lots and lots of stuff like that. Could we do better at getting that in front of people and helping people out? We are always looking for new, interesting and creative ways to do that, so yes.

Q75 **Chair:** So what would be the extent of the resources that you would put into efforts to reduce the impact of body dissatisfaction on your platforms?

Karim Palant: There are things that we do. One of the best ways to get help and support to people throughout their use of the platform is as they go about using it. If you are unhappy with what somebody has posted, we



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have put the “Report” button right there and then. It is difficult to say, “That is how much resource we put into x, y and z.” If you are an advertiser, say, we would put policies in place, and focus our work on preventing you from advertising using before and after pictures of a particular type of image, and so on and so forth. We put in a lot of time and effort there.

We have also put a lot of effort into working with the Diana Award, as I say. They have reached 3,000 schools: 20,000 young people in the UK have been trained as anti-bullying ambassadors, for example.

- Q76 **Chair:** Just to quantify that, would you be able to disclose the financial input that your company puts into ensuring that young people online do not suffer from body dissatisfaction? The effort is unquantifiable, but if we were looking at a financial output from your company, what would that be?

Karim Palant: I think it would be very difficult to put an accurate number on it, to be honest. I do not have the figures to hand, but I could tell you the funding that we give to various NGOs: Media Smart—the body image campaign that we run with the Advertising Association—the Diana Award’s anti-bullying ambassadors, or Childnet. I could tell you the individual amounts we give to those NGOs, potentially. I would have to look that up.

- Q77 **Chair:** Would you be able to provide that to us as evidence after today’s session?

Karim Palant: I will look into it, yes. I will go away and have a look into that.

- Q78 **Becca Moore:** Hi, I am Becca, the Vice-Chair of the Select Committee. Social media companies have been criticised by organisations such as the NSPCC, the Home Affairs Committee and others for failing to take responsibility for the content on their sites. What is your response to that kind of criticism?

Karim Palant: In the UK we have close to 40 million users on Facebook. Globally it has hit 2 billion. Clearly, on platforms of that scale, there are always going to be items of content that we would not want on there. We want to make sure that that is as close to zero as we can possibly get it. The way we tackle those issues is that we have very clear policies about what you can and cannot put on our platform. Those community standards are published online for everybody to see. Any item of content on any of those platforms can be reported and it will be viewed by a human being and taken down if it violates our community standards. That is the starting point.

There have been issues where an error has been made. That is really regrettable and unavoidable, and we should not have those. There have been occasions when we disagree with organisations, for example, about where we should and should not draw the line. Then there are some areas where there is just really unpleasant stuff that people say, and it is part of debate and part of the real world, or where people are treading a very fine



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line, but it is not actually against our community standards. Often it is not illegal and it is not anything that anyone should not be allowed to say, but it is really unpleasant.

In those circumstances, we will try to support organisations to do what we call counter-speech and counter-narratives, which are people putting positive speech. We will work with organisations and NGOs in given areas to help and support them to do that. For example, we work with Stonewall and the Rainbow Laces campaign, or we work with Tell MAMA, which encourages the reporting of Islamophobic abuse and things like that.

Q79 Becca Moore: In terms of that reporting process, how many moderators do you have working on content generated in the UK?

Karim Palant: For content generated in the UK it is hard to pick out. Globally we have 4,500 moderators who look at content reports. We recently announced that. Very few companies have disclosed how many people they have working on that kind of thing.

Q80 Becca Moore: Do you think that is enough, given the volume of content generated?

Karim Palant: No. We also announced we are going to increase it by 3,000. We are going to go to 7,500 as quickly as possible, increasing that and ramping that up quickly to deal with the issues that you have brought up.

Q81 Becca Moore: Finally, given that your algorithms already determine what content users see, do you not think that social media sites should take a bit more responsibility for the damaging content that is targeted towards young people—for example, if you look on a fitness site and then get weight loss adverts?

Karim Palant: First of all, you would not get weight loss adverts on Facebook if you were under 18. We do not allow that. Secondly, even adverts for diet, nutritional or exercise products are very limited in the ways in which they can depict bodies and so on according to our ads policy, so you can't do before and after pictures and stuff like that, or zoomed-in pictures of muscly men or whatever.

On your point around algorithms, the way in which the algorithm works means you would not see any content. Unless it was a paid advert, you would not see any content unless you were already following a page or had friends that shared stuff into your timeline. It just chooses what order you see it in. It does not choose what content to serve you up. You have gone out there and found what you find interesting and the things that you find engaging, and then it just orders it by pretty much what you find most engaging historically, based on the kinds of things you have engaged with in the past. It is driven by the user.

Q82 Chair: What responsibility do you take for the content in the first place? You have outlined that individuals expressing an interest is what causes it to come up as part of the algorithm. What responsibility do you take for the content being there in the first place?



Karim Palant: Everything on Facebook is posted by somebody. Primary responsibility for that is on them, but we obviously take responsibility for the way that people use our platform. That is a really important responsibility that we accept and take on. We have very clear policies: our community standards are online, and the advertising policies are even tougher than those. The community standards are online and are there for everybody to see. Anything that violates those community standards should not be on our platform and should come down. We rely predominantly on reports from users who say, "That shouldn't be on the platform; take it down." That is then reviewed by some of the people we talked about. That is what will happen.

Clearly, there is some stuff, the very harmful stuff, where there are ways in which you can develop technology that will prevent some of that stuff already being posted. Instagram, for example, has just launched a machine-learning process that will, for example, attempt to judge when someone is being very aggressive and using very aggressive language. It will attempt to down-rank that and hide it away from people so that it doesn't succeed on the platform. It will try and push that away from people's profiles.

Q83 Chair: Just before we move on to the next question, you gave the number of 7,500 moderators for a social media company that generates 2 billion users. Where did you come up with the number of 7,500? On our last panel, we had a number of reports suggesting that the length of time in between reporting what could be considered an abusive comment or an abusive post about an individual or a group of people was unacceptable. What is your response to that?

Karim Palant: I would say a few things. First of all, every platform is different, right? We take pride in what we do at Facebook and take it incredibly seriously, and Instagram runs through the same systems. Secondly, I would say that everybody on Facebook gets a reply. When you report, you get a reply—guaranteed. It goes into the support inbox, which everyone has on the app. The support inbox is there and it is where your replies will go, which will tell you whether we have taken something down or not and if not, why not and so on.

Generally speaking we aim to react to stuff within around 24 hours, as a kind of ballpark, but we will prioritise harm. Using human review, artificial intelligence and machine learning or whatever we will prioritise. Also, when people report, they can say what they are reporting something for. We will prioritise the things that may well have real-world harm and put them to the top of the queue. If someone says, "That's terrorist content" or "That's x or y or z", it will be reviewed. We will aim to get to the most crucially negative stuff as quickly as possible.

Q84 Chair: Where did you get the number 7,500 from for an acceptable number of moderators?

Karim Palant: The thing that is really going to make a difference to turnaround time will be improving systems and technology. Human review



is necessary to make the final call about taking stuff down, but frankly an awful lot of reviews are not really escalating stuff that is actually harmful—a huge amount of reviews. For example, a rumour will sweep that if everybody reports x page, it will get taken down, so we will get thousands of reports about that page. That obviously does not mean that it gets taken down, because it is judged against our community standards and not on the amount of reports. A lot of reports will be like that or will be people testing the tools or whatever. We are improving the technology all the time to drive using those people much more effectively and making sure we get the right reports in front of them. That is the thing that is really going to drive an improvement.

Q85 Chair: So how would you respond to the criticism that you could be accused of waiting for technology to develop rather than investing in an increased number of moderators to tackle the issue now?

Karim Palant: We are increasing it. We are almost doubling it.

Q86 Chair: To 7,500 for a platform of 2 billion?

Karim Palant: The thing is—here is a classic example. The EU recently did a test of how quickly platforms were turning round their hate speech complaints—complaints specifically about hate speech—and we performed really, really well on that test compared with a year ago. I think we pretty much showed that we really are moving in the right direction in terms of getting reports down and getting stuff down. Don't get me wrong: I'm not saying that our systems are absolutely perfect, we don't make mistakes, we couldn't be quicker or anything like that—absolutely not—and it is unacceptable if someone reports something and feels as though they are not getting dealt with properly. I absolutely would not want to argue with that at all, but we are investing a huge amount. We are not waiting for technology to solve this problem. We are investing in technology to solve the problem all the time. It is not that we are sat there going, "Oh well, someone will invent something that will solve this problem for us."

A classic example from last year is terrorist content, which is obviously a totally different issue. We built a technology with our fellow companies. When somebody reports a terror video to us—a video that ISIS might have launched and so on—and we take it down once, it goes into a database that means it cannot then be re-uploaded, not just to any of our platforms but also to Google, YouTube or Twitter, which are also part of this scheme. We share that database and technology. We are developing the technology all the time. It is not just going to be about the number of moderators; it is going to be about the technology we can develop to try to deal with that.

Q87 Yasmin-Jade Sides: I'm Yasmin. Thanks for being here today. What are your policies on deciding whether content that may encourage a negative body image should be removed?

Karim Palant: It is a hell of a lot easier with advertising where you can say, "Look, you shouldn't be using bodies, sexualised imagery and so on to promote these products in this way." So we have very, very strict



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standards for advertisers for a start; that's one thing. And when you put an advert in place, it has to be reviewed before it goes live, and very often they are blocked if they cross those boundaries.

With regard to stopping content that might provoke a negative body image, if it's me posting an image of me, or me posting an image of somebody I find attractive or whatever, that is probably much more difficult to police. We do not have nudity on the platform, for a start, and we do not have sexualised imagery, so that closes off some areas of concern. I think the rest is difficult because young people, and older people, are going to share images of things that they find interesting. It's people expressing themselves, whether it be physically or otherwise, and that's going to be really hard to police.

One of the key things is empowering young people to draw the distinction between, for example, a photoshopped image and one that is not. You don't need to be able to spot the difference; you just need to know that lots of people photoshop images, lots of platforms have filters on them and so on. That is an important bit of education we could do. But I think it is really hard for a platform to start policing it and saying, "Oh, actually, that photo is too touched-up; you shouldn't do that."

Q88 Alex Robertson: There have been some reports of fake Facebook profiles being set up to share sexually explicit images, particularly of young women. How big an issue do you think this is on the platform, and what is Facebook doing to help to counteract it?

Karim Palant: I'm not sure of the exact reports that you are talking about. Is there a specific issue? There are loads of issues in what you raise that I definitely will very happily deal with, but if there is a specific one—

Alex Robertson: It's when you get those ghost accounts adding you, and it's a sexually explicit image, of a young woman usually, and they are not real people; it's someone at the other end.

Karim Palant: Okay. Got you. If you think about the internet as a whole and how much spam and bad experience there is online generally, and you look at Facebook—well, this is the way I look at it. I look at it and think, "Actually, the people we have in-house, working day in, day out, to develop systems to stop stuff like that happening, do a really good job." Given the amount of that stuff, whether it be spam or a really bad user experience from some spam account, fake accounts and things like that that people are generating, it is a constant process of evolving the technology to stop people doing that, and it is really hard. It does happen; I have seen it happen. Just recently, we announced that we had developed something new. One thing about fake accounts, especially automated fake accounts, is that they are often the people who engage in more abuse. On Facebook, you have to be yourself; you have to be a real person. That minimises the extent to which people engage in trolling and stuff like that, because it's yourself; your mum can see you doing it. Those fake accounts tend to engage in more abusive behaviour, so one thing that we have done is to develop and put in place new systems that have removed tens



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of thousands of the fake accounts this year alone in the UK. Absolutely, it's a spammy and unpleasant experience and it shouldn't happen; and it's a job of work to keep up with the people who want to mess around, and stop that.

Q89 Michael Bryan: Fake accounts are often used to avoid blocks, so what further procedures can be considered? For instance, would working with internet providers for an IP ban work? To what extent can something be done?

Karim Palant: A fake account on Facebook specifically, or generally?

Michael Bryan: On any platform.

Karim Palant: With regard to IP bans, if we were to say to somebody, "Okay, we know your IP address and we're going to ban you from the internet," that would be quite a big step. There are legal systems and legal orders that people might put in place if somebody is a real offender and so on. That is quite a draconian punishment. I don't think that industry and the private sector will get together and go, "We're going to ban this individual from the internet." In my personal opinion, it is probably not for the private sector to get together and do that unless, for example, someone is reported to us as a sex offender. We ban sex offenders from the platform. If somebody is reported to us, we make sure that we log their details and they can't get on to the platform. If somebody is what we call a recidivist—somebody who violates our terms, gets kicked off the platform and tries to come back—we have systems in place to try and prevent them from coming back, whether it is using IP or other things to try and stop them coming back. It's a cat-and-mouse game, to be honest, because the real offenders will try new stuff.

We have technology in place. I am not the expert on it, and I am not sure how much we would say publicly, "Here're the tricks we use," because people could get round them, but we definitely invest and put a lot of effort into that area. The fundamental point is that we do not want people on there making it unpleasant for everybody else, because people won't come on to the platform and won't use it. The safety of our users is the most fundamental thing. People trusting the platform as a safe place is fundamental to people using it.

Q90 Michael Bryan: Do you have a method to block proxies and ways of getting round these bans?

Karim Palant: As I say, it is like a cat-and-mouse game. If we know that somebody is a repeat offender, we have the best systems we can put in place to keep up with what they are trying to do—we can stop them if someone reports them; if we spot them; if we have tools in place—but if someone is really determined to get on to a system like ours, we will catch them eventually and they will be reported to us eventually or something will happen. They will get on for a bit, but it is a cat-and-mouse game.

Chair: On a similar thread: Oscar.



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Q91 **Oscar Daniel:** How effective are these age restrictions on advertising when many young people under the age of 18 have Facebook and Instagram accounts?

Chair: Under the age of 13; sorry.

Karim Palant: First, there is an age restriction on Facebook. You should not have a Facebook or Instagram account if you are under the age of 13. That is because of the law. Secondly, on Facebook we want people with authentic identities and we want people's real identities to be expressed on Facebook. We don't allow fake profiles. That is because the experience that people want on Facebook is to speak to real people and to talk to a real person. That is one of the reasons for our success. Clearly, I will not say that we do not have anybody under the age of 13 who uses the platform. It would be impossible to guarantee that, but we do what we can to limit that and to keep it to a minimum.

Q92 **Chair:** What do you do specifically? What policies do you have in place to ensure that younger children do not have access?

Karim Palant: When you join Facebook you have to give your date of birth. If you give a date of birth below the age of 13 and then try and log back in and do it again, you will not get on because we spot that that computer has just entered a different date of birth. We have little tricks like that. If an under-13-year-old is reported to us, their page comes down. You can report anonymously. Your parents, your teacher or your friends at school can report you and nobody will ever know that that is what happened. We work with partners such as Internet Matters and the Diana Awards to educate people about why it is not sensible to be on when you are under 13.

Q93 **Chair:** Off the back of that, it seems the things that you can do that you have expressed are fairly limited. You're basing it on trusting the individual to put down their real date of birth. Would you ever consider putting a structure in place where for younger viewers up to the age of 18 there is a different atmosphere online for them, so that there is a change in the way that advertising works for over and under-18 users?

Karim Palant: Advertising already works differently if you are under 18. You can't advertise a whole range of products to people under the age of 18. You already have different systems in place. There are the UK advertising regulations, but there are our global rules as well. Our global rules are, in most cases, very similar to UK law, and where UK regulation goes beyond that, we have a good relationship with the Advertising Standards Authority when people report cases where it has gone beyond.

So we already have different rules for under-18s, obviously, and one thing to say is that on Instagram, for example, where it might not be your authentic identity—it might not be your real name and so on—we still use them. When you're advertising age-restricted products, whether it be alcohol, gambling or anything like that, we only advertise those things to Instagram users when they have, for example, linked their Instagram to their Facebook and we therefore know their age from Facebook. We would



not advertise an age-restricted product to any Instagram user; we would only advertise an age-restricted product to an Instagram user whose date of birth we knew, probably, most likely, because they had linked their account to their Facebook account.

- Q94 **Becca Moore:** If you have an 11-year-old who makes a Facebook account and they say they are 13 on it, as soon as they turn 13 Facebook lets them change their date of birth. Is Facebook looking at stopping that being possible?

Karim Palant: As in letting you change your date of birth?

Becca Moore: You can change your date of birth on Facebook—so someone can lie about their date of birth but change it when they become of age.

Karim Palant: I think you can change any of your details on Facebook whenever you like, I presume.

- Q95 **Becca Moore:** Do you think that an effective way of stopping under-13s going on Facebook would be to stop allowing people to change their date of birth?

Karim Palant: On the other hand, if someone goes on and puts that they are 13 when they are 11 and they get to 16, we do not want them seeing alcohol or gambling ads and so on at 16, so I would say that the most important thing is for parents, teachers, ourselves, youth groups and whatever to communicate as much as possible to young people that there is not much benefit to being that.

There is only so much we can do about the fact that kids are getting very powerful pieces of technology—mobile phones—at the age of 10 on average in the UK. There is only so much we as a social media company and a platform can do about that. We can do a lot of education with parents and the kids to say, “As soon as your kids start, even when they are young enough to sit on your knee and use an iPad to look at videos and whatever with you, having a conversation with them about what is safe and not safe online is really important.” We spend a lot of time and effort with Internet Matters and our Parents Portal or whatever trying to push that message to parents, because actually, if a kid really wants to get online, they can, so it is more about making sure that at certain stages in life we are giving them the help and support we can.

- Q96 **Oscar Daniel:** I know you are saying it is not allowed that 13-year-olds are allowed on, but say they were to go on, would you say that your advertising that is suitable for under-18s is appropriate for an 11 or 12-year-old?

Karim Palant: No. You should not be on Facebook if you are under 13. The way that Facebook advertising works is that people will use what they know about the users and what users tell us as they go about their business, so an 11-year-old is not going to be interested in the same stuff as a 16-year-old. Generally speaking, if they are on Facebook and they are using a fake date of birth, they are unlikely to be targeted with the kind of



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advertises that a 16-year-old would be targeted with anyway, because someone who is advertising at 16-year-olds would be focusing on things they are interested in, which an 11-year-old would not necessarily be interested in.

So there is some scope there, but actually in truth the main thing is that we work with, for example, the Committee of Advertising Practice, who are the people who draw up the rules for advertisers in the UK, on some guidance for advertisers, which is about how to make sure not only that you are targeting the right age groups, but that the interests that you are targeting go along with those age groups and that those interests are age-appropriate. That is a really important safeguard to make sure for people. We would say that, compared to all other forms of advertising, social media advertising, particularly on Facebook, is probably the best targeted there is. That is our unique selling point.

Chair: A quick question from Zac.

- Q97 **Zacchaeus Hayward:** Advertising regulators in the UK and US have expressed concern that content creators on Instagram are failing to make it clear when they are paid to promote a product. What have you done to address this?

Chair: Please be as brief as possible.

Karim Palant: Sure. We have a thing on Facebook, the branded content tool, and two or three weeks ago—last month—we launched a similar thing on Instagram. If you are an Instagram influencer or Instagrammer and you want to be paid to promote a product in your feed, you can. We ask you to do it through that tool and it will then show up if it is a paid advert. If someone is paying for the advert, it says “sponsored”. I don’t know if you’ve seen that on Facebook or Instagram. Now it says “paid”. If it is not a paid advert, like a sponsored advert, and instead I have been paid, but I am not paying to promote the post, then it says “paid” as part of the new tool that will do that. We can’t force someone to do that, but the tools are there and people should be transparent. The rules in the UK are very clear.

Chair: A quick question from Sam.

- Q98 **Samuel Pidgeon:** How much attention has the UK Council for Child Internet Safety paid to body image issues among young people?

Karim Palant: The honest answer is I am not 100% sure, but I know that it has paid a lot of attention to this thing called digital resilience, which is a catch-all phrase for making sure that people are able to distinguish online between, for example, whether an image is photoshopped or not and understanding that what they see online might not be the real world and what people have chosen to put online is not the full picture. I know it has been a much discussed issue. From what I am picking up from you guys and from this piece of work it should probably be higher up the agenda and we should talk about it more.



Q99 Aisha Malik-Smith: The NSPCC has called for an independent body to ensure internet companies are accountable for the safety of children online. Do you agree with such an approach?

Karim Palant: There are countries that have taken that approach and it has not, as far as I understand, made a massive amount of difference, but that does not mean it is not an important thing to discuss. We work incredibly well in partnership with organisations such as the NSPCC and UKCCIS. We feel incredibly accountable to our users to make sure that they feel safe on our platform. One of the challenges is whether this person is going to add to what is already there and build on it and help increase that co-operation and that cross-industry work with government and industry, or will it end up being a conflict? That would not be very good for young people in my view.

It's a discussion to have. I have also heard that suggestion from other organisations. I am never quite 100% sure what powers, if any, there would be. It is definitely the case—the NSPCC is right to point this out; we are working with them on some projects around this, actually—that when a young person is feeling down because of something that has happened online and something negative has happened, we need to find ways to get more help and support to that young person and find somewhere for them to go and someone to talk to at that point. There is definitely a gap there that needs filling. I am just not 100% sure what exactly it looks like.

Q100 Emma Curran: A recent RSPH report recommended pop-up warnings of heavy usage on social media. Is this something you have considered?

Karim Palant: I don't know about you, but a lot of people complain about pop-ups on websites. A lot of people don't like them. They get very frustrated with them and tend not to read them. So I am not sure, but we work really hard to ensure that young people and parents, especially when young people go online for the first time, understand some of the basic tips in terms of how long you should spend online.

Internet Matters, the campaign that we fund, and the Parents Portal that we produced have lots of tips for parents about, for example, how to have a conversation with their kids about not taking their phone to bed with them, putting it on airplane mode beyond a certain time at night and taking a break. Those are the kinds of things that we will communicate to young people through those kinds of campaigns, and that is an important part of the work we do.

Q101 Oscar Daniel: Photos on social media are often digitally altered. Would you consider implementing a voluntary code that allowed advertisers or content creators to insert a symbol that indicated that a photo had been substantially altered?

Karim Palant: If advertisers in the UK wanted to do that now, they could do it. You could put that in the image. We wouldn't—

Q102 Becca Moore: But would you have that as an option with the filters you can get on profile pictures? I'm talking about something that you can



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tick—"Has this photo been altered?"

Oscar Daniel: So it's easier for the advertiser to do that.

Becca Moore: An option every time you post a photo.

Karim Palant: The thing is, advertisers are responsible. I think this is an important distinction: the way UK advertising regulation works is that the advertiser is responsible for what they produce, where they place it and who they target. That is the regulatory framework. It is really important to be clear, because you wouldn't want a negative outcome from advertising to turn up and people to start arguing about whose fault it is. It is really important to have clarity that the advertiser is liable for the advert, what is in it, who they are targeting and so on. We provide them with tools to make sure that they do it in a responsible way. I don't know that necessarily an additional tool is what they need to be able to do that. They could put in their advert a little disclaimer or whatever they wanted. I'm not sure a tool—

Q103 **Becca Moore:** But what about someone just posting a photo on Instagram, a content creator, like the social media people we had in earlier?

Karim Palant: Is it for—

Becca Moore: Let's say that you post a photo and want to let people know that it has been digitally altered, so that they know it's not necessarily a realistic beauty standard. Would you consider making that an option? What do you think about it as an idea?

Karim Palant: I'm not a visual artist. If someone is an Instagrammer or whatever and they are posting a picture of themselves and have touched it up, put a filter on it or whatever, then for a start, how do you make sure they are telling the truth? In the real world, people see images of other people of all types all over the place, whether it be on telly, in the papers, in posters or on social media. They see them everywhere and they're not always marked with "This is a real image", "This is not a real image", "This has been touched up", "This has not been touched up". It's really, really hard to say that by marking each one, to say one thing or another, you are going to solve this. That is not, in the end, going to solve the problem. What is going to solve the problem is young people knowing and understanding—as they go through education and are coming out the other end, with their parents and the friends they meet online or offline, they get together and develop an understanding that says, "The reason why someone has published this image is that it shows something that that person wants to show. It is not the full picture; it is not the real world." That, in the end, will be what changes things.

Q104 **Chair:** So to summarise, you don't think this would be effective. It is not something you would consider as being effective on your platform.

Karim Palant: I don't think it solves the problem, no.

Q105 **Yasmin-Jade Sides:** Could the data you collect on your users be used to



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identify which were likely to be suffering from serious body image issues, and if so, could you target information about useful resources and organisations at those users?

Karim Palant: This is a really sensitive issue, because obviously people's privacy and their right not to have us prying into their mental health and wellbeing is really, really important—that is one of the most important things that we can do as a platform. I think people would generally feel really uncomfortable with us using anonymised data to target particular messages at people we thought were vulnerable to particular things.

That said, there are things that we do where we are alerted to the fact that somebody might be having a difficult time and we try to get help and support to them. If you see a friend who you think is in distress—say they post something that suggests that they are down or upset—what you can do is report that individual to us and say, "I think this person is going through a tough time." They will get a message from us that says, "A friend of yours said that you might be experiencing a tough time. Have you thought about talking to the Samaritans?" That is an example. We work in different countries with different organisations, and in the UK it is the Samaritans, to get that help to that person. In that circumstance, we rely on user reports.

On Instagram there are certain hashtags. When you go to click on a hashtag or search for a hashtag, they can be associated with normal stuff but they can be associated with really upsetting stuff. We don't want to block the entire hashtag. A classic example would be #bluewhale. A blue whale is a blue whale; it is a big thing in the sea. We cannot block people talking about them on Instagram. But it is also a really negative trend that young people get involved in around self-harm and so on. We cannot block #bluewhale, but what we will say is that when someone goes to search for that we will put a little warning up that says, "Did you know that sometimes on this hashtag people share upsetting and difficult things. Are you sure you want to search for it?" We will put a warning there and we will also try to down-rank stuff that is linked to that negative stuff. We do try to proactively get to people when they are potentially in trouble and having emotional difficulty, but it is really difficult, and people would have a huge problem with us guessing that someone was upset or down based on their emotional state.

Q106 **Chair:** Do you consider that you are doing enough in that regard?

Karim Palant: We are always trying to do more. We are always improving and trying to develop new partnerships and tools. Just a few weeks ago we launched a new tool whereby if someone posted a sexualised image of themselves to share it with a partner, and that was then subsequently shared, they could then report it to us and it would go into a database and could not be re-shared. That is a brand new thing that we just did a few weeks ago. It is about those kinds of things. We are always trying to innovate on the technology, add new people, work with new partners and develop new tools and resources all the time. We should do more, and I would love to hear from you guys what more you want—



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Q107 **Chair:** Perhaps at a later date you'll be able to provide us with what sort of financial resources you have put into those kinds of programmes.

Karim Palant: I can look into individual ones that we do, what the resourcing is for those, how many people they have reached and things like that. I can get you more information on that.

Chair: Okay.

Q108 **Becca Moore:** This is to do with partnering with other organisations that offer help to people who are suffering with body image issues, for example, and other mental health related things. To what extent would you consider partnering with those organisations to advertise on social media platforms?

Karim Palant: Partnering with any organisations or—

Becca Moore: Organisations that have expertise in those issues.

Karim Palant: To help them advertise on Facebook?

Becca Moore: Yes.

Karim Palant: Absolutely. We already have loads of partnership with organisations to do that, and would love to have more. For example, Media Smart is one that does body image campaigns, and we help to provide support for those. We do stuff with Internet Matters and so on, but we would love to find more partners that could do work in this area, especially if you guys think that this is an important area that you want to see more in. We would love to talk to you guys about who you have spoken to as part of this work and think would be really interesting organisations to take forward and do more on.

Q109 **Chair:** As a penultimate question, Facebook makes money from advertisers that advertise on Facebook, correct?

Karim Palant: Yes.

Q110 **Chair:** How much control would you say that you have over the content that advertisers put on your platforms?

Karim Palant: There are very clear advertising policies that are posted publicly online. Any advert that people submit to us is reviewed against those standards and if it does not meet them, it is blocked.

Q111 **Chair:** Okay. As a final question, do you have any recommendations for us to submit in our report to the Government on changing the way that governmental legislation and policy works in dealing with the issue of body image, particularly regarding social media?

Karim Palant: Sure. I actually had a meeting earlier today at the Department for Education to talk to some people there—just a very interesting, informal chat. We would be really keen to work with UKCCIS and really keen to work with people like yourselves—organisations like yours and organisations that represent young people in this space, to try



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and help, for example when the curriculum comes through for personal, social and health education in the next few months, because that is going to be compulsory, I think. I cannot remember which years exactly it is going to be compulsory for, but we would love to work with everybody in this space to make sure that that curriculum was as interesting and engaging as possible in this area, so that it was able to give people a real sense of what it is like online—to judge between an authentic image or not, or to see themselves for themselves, to share their authentic selves online, have a positive experience online, get the best out of it and find people who share their interests online. So I think that would be easily the most powerful thing, and we would love to be part of that discussion. Anything that advertisers want to do—we would love to be involved in those discussions as well, around ways in which best practices can be improved.

Chair: Perfect. Thank you very much. I thank our witnesses; we really appreciate them coming in and speaking to us today. That concludes the public session.