His Job Was to Make Instagram Safe for Teens. His 14-Year-Old Showed Him What the App Was Really Like.

- "I wanted to bring to your attention what I believe is a critical gap in how we as a company approach harm, and how the people we serve experience it," he began. Though Meta META 0.13%increase; green up pointing triangle regularly issued public reports suggesting that it was largely on top of safety issues on its platforms, he wrote, the company was deluding itself.

- The experience of young users on Meta's Instagram—where Bejar had spent the previous two years working as a consultant—was especially acute. In a subsequent email to Instagram head Adam Mosseri, one statistic stood out: One in eight users under the age of 16 said they had experienced unwanted sexual advances on the platform over the previous seven days.

- For Bejar, that finding was hardly a surprise. His daughter and her friends had been receiving unsolicited penis pictures and other forms of harassment on the platform since the age of 14, he wrote, and Meta's systems generally ignored their reports—or responded by saying that the harassment didn't violate platform rules.

- "I am appealing to you because I believe that working this way will require a culture shift," Bejar wrote to Zuckerberg—the company would have to acknowledge that its existing approach to governing Facebook and Instagram wasn't working. But Bejar declared himself optimistic that Meta was up to the task: "I know that everyone in m-team team deeply cares about the people we serve," he wrote, using Meta's internal shorthand for Zuckerberg and his top deputies.

- Two years later, the problems Bejar identified remain unresolved, and new blind spots have emerged. The company launched a sizable child-safety task force in June, following revelations that Instagram was cultivating connections among large-scale networks of pedophilic users, an issue the company says it's working to address.

- Asked for comment for this article, Meta disputed Bejar's assertion that it paid too little attention to user experience and failed to sufficiently act on the findings of its Well-Being Team.

- Monitoring the posts of what was then Facebook's 300 million-odd users wasn't as simple as enforcing rules. There was too much interaction on Facebook to police it all, and what upset users was often subjective.

- Instagram acted so rarely on reports of such behavior that the girls no longer bothered reporting them.

- From the beginning, there was a hurdle facing any effort to address widespread problems experienced by Instagram users: Meta's own statistics suggested that big problems didn't exist.

- During the four years Bejar had spent away from the company, Meta had come to approach governing user behavior as an overwhelmingly automated process. Engineers would compile data sets of unacceptable content—things like terrorism, pornography, bullying or "excessive gore"—and then train machine-learning models to screen future content for similar material.

- According to the company's own metrics, the approach was tremendously effective. Within a few years, the company boasted that 99% of the terrorism content that it took down had been removed without a user having reported it. While users could still flag things that upset them, Meta shifted resources away from reviewing them. To discourage users from filing reports, internal documents from 2019 show, Meta added steps to the reporting process. Meta said the changes were meant to discourage frivolous reports and educate users about platform rules.

- The systems didn't catch anywhere near the majority of banned content—only the majority of what the company ultimately removed. As a data scientist warned Guy Rosen, Facebook's head of integrity at the time, Meta's classifiers were reliable enough to remove only a low single-digit percentage of hate speech with any degree of precision.

- "Mark personally values freedom of expression first and foremost and would say this is a feature and not a bug," Rosen responded on Facebook's internal communication platform.

- Narrow rules and unreliable automated enforcement systems left a lot of room for bad behavior—but they made the company's child-safety statistics look pretty good according to Meta's metric of choice: prevalence.

- Defined as the percentage of content viewed worldwide that explicitly violates a Meta rule, prevalence was the company's preferred measuring stick for the problems users experienced. Yet Meta's publicly released prevalence numbers were invariably tiny. According to prevalence, child exploitation was so rare on the platform that it couldn't be reliably estimated, less than 0.05%, the threshold for functional measurement. Content deemed to encourage self-harm, such as eating disorders, was just as minimal, and rule violations for bullying and harassment occurred in just eight of 10,000 views.

- "There's a grading-your-own-homework problem," said Zvika Krieger, a former director of responsible innovation at Meta who worked with the Well-Being Team. "Meta defines what constitutes harmful content, so it shapes the discussion of how successful it is at dealing with it."

- Modeled on a recurring survey of Facebook users, the team built a new questionnaire called BEEF, short for "Bad Emotional Experience Feedback." A recurring survey of issues 238,000 users had experienced over the past seven days, the effort identified problems with prevalence from the start: Users were 100 times more likely to tell

Instagram they'd witnessed bullying in the last week than Meta's bullying-prevalence statistics indicated they should.

- While "bad experiences" were a problem for users across Meta's platforms, they seemed particularly common among teens on Instagram.
- The vast gap between the low prevalence of content deemed problematic in the company's own statistics and what users told the company they experienced suggested that Meta's definitions were off, Bejar argued. And if the company was going to address issues such as unwanted sexual advances, it would have to begin letting users "express these experiences to us in the product."
- But among the ranks of Meta's senior middle management, Bejar and Krieger said, BEEF hit a wall. Managers who had made their careers on incrementally improving prevalence statistics weren't receptive to the suggestion that the approach wasn't working.
- The hope that the team's work would continue didn't last. The company stopped conducting the specific survey behind BEEF, then laid off most everyone who'd worked on it as part of what Zuckerberg called Meta's "year of efficiency."
- If Meta was to change, Bejar told the Journal, the effort would have to come from the outside. He began consulting with a coalition of state attorneys general who filed suit against the company late last month, alleging that the company had built its products to maximize engagement at the expense of young users' physical and mental health. Bejar also got in touch with members of Congress about where he believes the company's user-safety efforts fell short.

Meta Pledges to Allow Marketplace Customers to Opt Out of Data Sharing, U.K. Regulator Says

https://www.wsj.com/tech/meta-pledges-to-allow-marketplace-customers-to-opt-out-of-data-sharing-uk-regulator-says-6a5bdb98?mod=followamazon

Nov. 3, 2023

- The U.K. competition regulator said Meta META 0.13%increase; green up pointing triangle Platforms has pledged to allow its Facebook Marketplace customers to opt out of having their data used by the company, and for it to limit how it uses advertising data for its own product development.
- Meta also pledged to limit how it uses advertising data when developing its products, the CMA said.
- "We welcome the CMA's decision to close its investigation into Marketplace on the basis of the commitments offered by Meta to put in place systems and controls designed to confirm and validate that advertiser data from competitors is not used in Marketplace. We also welcome the CMA's confirmation that it found no concerns with respect to the use of advertising data in Facebook Dating," a Meta company spokesperson said.

On Instagram, Palestinian journalists and digital creators documenting Gaza strikes see surge in followers

https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/social-media/instagram-palestinian-journalists-digital-creators-document-gaza-strik-rcna123067

Nov. 3, 2023,

- Before early October, Motaz Azaiza's Instagram account documented life in Gaza to about 25,000 followers with a mix of daily life and the ongoing hostilities between Israel and Hamas.
- That began to change in the days after Hamas' terrorist attack on Israel and the retaliation on Gaza. Since then, more than 12.5 million people have begun following Azaiza's feed, which has become a daily chronicle of Israeli strikes.
- Many other journalists, digital creators and people active on social media based in the region have seen a similar uptick in followers.
- It's a role that Instagram may not fully embrace (parent company Meta has broadly moved away from the news), but it appears the company is doing little to discourage the growth of the accounts. The app has rules against graphic content but does make exceptions for posts that are "newsworthy and in the public interest." Some posts are initially covered by a "sensitive content" warning.
- Instagram and other social media apps have come under some scrutiny over concerns that pro-Palestinian voices have been censored or suppressed. Meta confirmed in October that the company had accidentally limited the reach of some posts but said the problem was a bug that did not apply to one specific type of content and denied any censorship.
- The emergence of Instagram also comes as the social media platform X, once the go-to destination for journalists and witnesses to breaking news, has come under fire for its shortcomings around misinformation related to the conflict. Telegram is also a popular app for unfiltered updates but has a relatively small user base in the U.S.

WhatsApp's AI shows gun-wielding children when prompted with 'Palestine'

https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/nov/02/whatsapps-ai-palestine-kids-gun-gaza-bias-israel

Nov 3, 2023

- A WhatsApp feature that generates images in response to users' searches returns a picture of a gun or a boy with a gun when prompted with the terms "Palestinian", "Palestine" or "Muslim boy Palestinian", the Guardian has learned.
- Prompts for "Israeli boy" generated cartoons of children playing soccer and reading. In response to a prompt for "Israel army" the AI created drawings of soldiers smiling and praying, no guns involved.
- The discovery comes as Meta has come under fire from many Instagram and Facebook users who are posting content supportive of Palestinians. As the Israeli bombardment of Gaza continues, users say Meta is enforcing its moderation policies in a biased way, a practice they say amounts to censorship. Users have reported being hidden from other users without explanation and say they have seen a steep drop in engagement with their posts.
- Meta previously said in a statement that "it is never our intention to suppress a particular community or point of view", but that due to "higher volumes of content being reported" surrounding the ongoing conflict, "content that doesn't violate our policies may be removed in error".

AI companies have all kinds of arguments against paying for copyrighted content

https://www.theverge.com/2023/11/4/23946353/generative-ai-copyright-training-data-openai-microsoft-google-meta-stabilityai

Nov 4, 2023

- The US Copyright Office is taking public comment on potential new rules around generative AI's use of copyrighted materials, and the biggest AI companies in the world had plenty to say. We've collected the arguments from Meta, Google, Microsoft, Adobe, Hugging Face, StabilityAI, and Anthropic below, as well as a response from Apple that focused on copyrighting AI-written code.
- There are some differences in their approaches, but the overall message for most is the same: They don't think they should have to pay to train AI models on copyrighted work.
- Meta: Copyright holders wouldn't get much money anyway
  - Imposing a first-of-its-kind licensing regime now, well after the fact, will cause chaos as developers seek to identify millions and millions of rightsholders, for very little benefit, given that any fair royalty due would be incredibly small in light of the insignificance of any one work among an AI training set.

TikTok Denies Claims of Favoring Pro-Palestinian Content

https://www.theinformation.com/briefings/tiktok-denies-claims-of-favoring-pro-palestinian-content?utm_campaign=%5BTI-AM%5D+The+Informat&utm_content=131&utm_medium=email&utm_source=cio&utm_term=32&rc=hm8aii

Nov 6, 2023

- TikTok is denying claims that it has amplified pro-Palestinian content, which Republican lawmakers including Sen. Marco Rubio and Sen. Marsha Blackburn have used to reignite calls to ban the app.
- For years, bipartisan lawmakers have called for a ban of TikTok over national security concerns related to its parent, China's ByteDance. Those calls resurfaced in the past week after the venture capitalist and former Tinder executive Jeff Morris, Jr. posted a viral thread citing TikTok-generated all-time viewership statistics for the hashtags #standwithpalestine and #standwithisrael. He argued that "the TikTok narrative now is so anti-Israel."

Instagram's paid creator subscriptions are still a tiny business

https://www.theverge.com/2023/11/6/23948770/instagram-paid-subscriptions-million-milestone

Nov 6, 2023

- There are now 1 million paid subscriptions to creators on Instagram, slowly transforming the platform into a space where creators can get paid directly by their fans.
- It's a big milestone but a small number for Instagram: the service has around 2 billion monthly users. Patreon, meanwhile, is estimated to have more than 30 million paid subscriptions — albeit with about a decade's head start.
- The company is going to start promoting subscriptions in Instagram's feed, putting a big "Subscribe" button at the top of every post so that non-paying followers know it's available. Creators will be able to offer 30-day free trials, and Instagram is adding a tool to let creators bulk DM new subscribers to chat with them, which could help get fans to stick around.
- Instagram has been steadily expanding where its subscription features are available. Subscriptions initially launched in the US in July 2022 and then expanded to dozens more countries over the following months. Meta says it's still expanding additional paid features, like "Instagram gifts" — essentially, paid tips — to more countries, too. The company still isn't taking a cut of the money that creators make, though it plans to do so eventually.

- Meta also lets creators offer subscriptions on Facebook, so the company's total creator subscription business is certainly bigger than the 1 million figure announced for Instagram. (Meta hasn't shared a number on the total number of Facebook subscriptions.) The company has started offering subscriptions itself, too: there's the Meta Verified subscription for $12 per month in the US, and then there's the ad-free subscription for €9.99 per month in the European Union.
- There's clearly an effort underway at Meta to get more money coming in directly from users, rather than having to rely so dominantly on the mercurial ad market. It seems to be slow going for now, but these are still fairly nascent efforts, too.

Meta bars political advertisers from using generative AI ads tools
https://www.reuters.com/technology/meta-bar-political-advertisers-using-generative-ai-ads-tools-2023-11-06/
November 7, 2023
- Facebook owner Meta (META.O) is barring political campaigns and advertisers in other regulated industries from using its new generative AI advertising products, a company spokesperson said on Monday, denying access to tools that lawmakers have warned could turbo-charge the spread of election misinformation.
- "As we continue to test new Generative AI ads creation tools in Ads Manager, advertisers running campaigns that qualify as ads for Housing, Employment or Credit or Social Issues, Elections, or Politics, or related to Health, Pharmaceuticals or Financial Services aren't currently permitted to use these Generative AI features," the company said in a note appended to several pages explaining how the tools work.
- The companies have released little information so far about the safety guard rails they plan to impose on those systems, making Meta's decision on political ads one of the industry's most significant AI policy choices to come to light to date.
- Google has also planned a mid-November policy update to require that election-related ads must include a disclosure if they contain "synthetic content that inauthentically depicts real or realistic-looking people or events."
- TikTok bars political ads, while Snapchat owner Snap (SNAP.N) blocks them in its AI chatbot. Snapchat also uses human review to fact-check all political ads, which includes vetting for misleading use of AI. X, previously known as Twitter, has not rolled out any generative AI advertising tools.
- Meta narrowly bans misleading AI-generated video in all content, including organic non-paid posts, with an exception for parody or satire.
- The company's independent Oversight Board said last month it would examine the wisdom of that approach, taking up a case involving a doctored video of U.S. President Joe Biden that Meta said it had left up because it was not AI-generated.

Execs ignored the damage Instagram does to teens, Meta whistleblower tells Congress
https://edition.cnn.com/2023/11/07/tech/meta-ignored-warnings-instagrams-harm/
November 7, 2023
- Meta's top executives, including CEO Mark Zuckerberg, ignoredwarnings for years about harms to teens on its platforms such as Instagram, a company whistleblower told a Senate subcommittee on Tuesday.
- Meta instead fosters a culture of "see no evil, hear no evil" that overlooks evidence of harm internally while publicly presenting carefully crafted metrics to downplay the issue, said Arturo Bejar, an ex-Facebook engineering director and consultant.
- "It is unacceptable that a 13-year-old girl gets propositioned on social media," Bejar testified, citing a statistic from his research finding that more than 25% of 13-to-15-year-olds have reported receiving unwanted sexual advances on Instagram. "This is unacceptable, and my work has shown that it doesn't need to be this way."
- Amid criticisms of its platforms, Meta has rolled out some 30 parental controls to manage who their kids can talk to or how much time they spend on Facebook and Instagram.
- Tuesday's hearing once again places Meta in the bipartisan crosshairs of Congress, which has long struggled to come up with laws and regulations for social media in the face of industry lobbying, First Amendment concerns and, in some cases, substantive policy disagreements between Republicans and Democrats. Meanwhile, both parties have united behind blaming Meta for contributing to a nationwide mental health crisis.
- "Every day countless people inside and outside of Meta are working on how to help keep young people safe online," said Meta spokesman Andy Stone in a statement. "The issues raised here regarding user perception surveys highlight one part of this effort, and surveys like these have led us to create features like anonymous notifications of potentially hurtful content and comment warnings."
- Stone added that while the specific user perception survey Bejar worked on is no longer run at the company, Meta still performs many other types of user perception surveys and that some of the tools it's introduced for teens — such as a feature to silently mute other users — are a direct result of those surveys.

- Lawmakers on Tuesday ripped into the social media giant, saying they were "in no way surprised" by Bejar's allegations and calling for swift passage of legislation to rein in Meta and other tech giants.
- Bejar left Facebook in 2015 but returned as a consultant working on user well-being issues in 2019 following his daughter's run-ins with unwanted sexual advances. Though his daughter reported the incidents, he said, Facebook did nothing.
- Hired by Facebook to study the issue, Bejar said he soon ran into institutional hurdles.
- Meta has previously said that its incentives are aligned with users on safety issues and that Meta acts aggressively on harmful material because it knows users do not want to see it. But Bejar told lawmakers Tuesday he believes users' experiences would meaningfully improve if Zuckerberg were required to disclose survey data on every earnings call about self-reported bad experiences on company platforms.
- According to the Wall Street Journal, Bejar's survey work found that more than 1 in 4 users under age 16 reported having a "bad experience" with Instagram as a result of "witnessing hostility against someone based on their race, religion or identity."
- One of Bejar's key allegations is that Meta has poured enormous resources into automated detection of clearly rule-breaking content, while diverting resources away from costly human reviews of situations that do not neatly or explicitly violate Meta's rules but that may be distressing to users nonetheless.
- "Big Tech is very much in danger," Blumenthal said, mentioning previous government actions to curb harmful products. He said everyday Americans understand "the harm being done" and compared it to harms from smoking. He said Big Tech is "the next Big Tobacco."

Meta, Discord and others unveil effort to combat online child sexual exploitation and abuse

https://techcrunch.com/2023/11/07/meta-discord-and-others-unveil-effort-to-combat-online-child-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/

November 7, 2023

- The Tech Coalition, the group of tech companies developing approaches and policies to combat online child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA), today announced the launch of a new program, Lantern, designed to enable social media platforms to share "signals" about activity and accounts that might violate their policies against CSEA.
- Participating platforms in Lantern — which so far include Discord, Google, Mega, Meta, Quora, Roblox, Snap and Twitch — can upload signals to Lantern about activity that runs afoul of their terms,
- Other participating platforms can then select from the signals available in Lantern, run the selected signals against their platform, review any activity and content the signals surface and take appropriate action.
- The Tech Coalition is careful to note that these signals aren't definitive proof of abuse. Rather, they offer only clues for follow-up investigations — and evidence to supply to the relevant authorities and law enforcement.
- "Because [child sexual abuse] spans across platforms, in many cases, any one company can only see a fragment of the harm facing a victim. To uncover the full picture and take proper action, companies need to work together," The Tech Coalition wrote in a blog post published this morning. "We are committed to including Lantern in the Tech Coalition's annual transparency report and providing participating companies with recommendations on how to incorporate their participation in the program into their own transparency reporting."
- In September, the attorneys general in all 50 U.S. states, plus four territories, signed onto a letter calling for Congress to take action against AI-enabled CSAM. Meanwhile, the European Union has proposed to mandate that tech companies scan for CSAM while identifying and reporting grooming activity targeting kids on their platforms.

Meta to Require Campaigns to Disclose AI-Altered Political Ads

https://www.wsj.com/tech/ai/meta-to-require-campaigns-to-disclose-ai-altered-political-ads-b421b806?mod=followamazon

Nov. 8, 2023

- Meta Platforms META 0.41%increase; green up pointing triangle on Wednesday announced that it will require advertisers to disclose when they run political ads with media that has been digitally altered by artificial intelligence or other software ahead of the U.S. presidential election in 2024.
- The Facebook parent company said the new policy will go into effect at the start of the new year. Political advertisers will have to disclose when an ad contains an image, video or audio that was digitally created or altered significantly.
- The U.S. primary elections that will begin in January may be the first big test for how content produced with generative AI will affect U.S. elections.
- The company said advertisers won't need to disclose digitally created or altered content that is immaterial, but Meta noted that advertisers that it determines didn't make disclosures as required by its policy will have their ads rejected. Advertisers that repeatedly fail to make necessary disclosures may also face penalties, Meta said.
- In addition to political ads, the new policy will apply to ads related to social issues.

- Meta also recently noted that it will not allow advertisers to use the company's own generative AI ads creation tools to make political ads. This was reported earlier by Reuters.

Meta Strikes Deal to Return to China After 14 Years
https://www.wsj.com/tech/meta-strikes-deal-to-return-to-china-after-14-years-9c6012a9?mod=followamazon
Nov. 9, 2023

- Meta Platforms META 0.27%increase; green up pointing triangle has struck a preliminary deal to sell a new, lower-priced version of its virtual-reality headset in China, regaining a foothold among consumers in the country 14 years after Facebook was shut out.
- The agreement with Tencent Holdings TCEHY 0.82%increase; green up pointing triangle will make the world's largest videogame company the exclusive seller of Meta's headsets in China, people familiar with the matter said, offering the U.S. technology giant a major new market as it looks to boost tepid global demand for its niche gear. Tencent will start selling the headset beginning late 2024, with the two companies reaching a deal after about a year of negotiations.
- The deal is provisional and details are subject to change. It isn't clear whether Tencent needs to seek formal government approval for introducing Meta's device and offering VR content on the platform—as it does for the Nintendo Switch and conventional videogames—since the country hasn't issued rules for VR yet. Beijing has tightened regulations for videogames and other digital content, which could create hurdles for the deal.
- In the deal, Meta would take a bigger share of device sales and Tencent would take more of the content and service revenue, such as software subscriptions and game sales, a person familiar with the matter said. The headset would provide games and other apps published by Tencent, the person said.
- The market leader in China's VR-headset industry, TikTok-owner ByteDance, is cutting hundreds of jobs in its Pico headset unit as it struggles with lackluster sales. Pico's marketing, sales and content teams will be downsized as it restructures to focus on hardware and other core technologies.
- Tencent came close to disbanding its extended-reality technology team, which includes its VR efforts, in February as it scaled back investment. As the deal with Meta neared agreement, Tencent rebuilt the team in August, people familiar with the matter said.
- Meta was the global headset-market leader in the second quarter of 2023, with about 50% market share, according to data from market research firm IDC, while Sony and ByteDance's Pico were the second- and third-largest headset makers. Meta's Quest 3 starts from $500 and Sony's PlayStation VR2 costs $550. Pico costs around $340 in China and isn't sold in the U.S.
- Global headset shipment fell 44.6% in the quarter from a year ago, IDC data shows. The market research firm expects 8.5 million headsets to ship this year, slightly more than in 2017.
- With demand cooling, headset makers are re-examining their pricing strategies and considering selling more to professional users and company buyers who are more open to using such technology to improve productivity, executives and analysts say. Consumer hardware—mainly used for videogames and other digital entertainment—is likely to remain a niche market in the near future.
- In China, the VR market ended a two-year growth streak with a 56% decline in headset shipments in the first half of this year, according to technology analyst Counterpoint Research. Pico—with a 50% market share there—has this year scaled back marketing efforts and lowered shipment targets. Sony took 19% after its February debut.
- The potential competition from Vision Pro, as well as Meta's partnership with Tencent, are likely to enhance the sales and adoption of such extended reality devices in China, said Flora Tang, a senior analyst at Counterpoint.

Threads users can keep their posts off Instagram and Facebook now
https://www.theverge.com/2023/11/12/23957591/threads-facebook-instagram-suggested-posts-opt-out
Nov 12, 2023

- Many Threads users are now saying they have the ability to opt out of having their posts shown on Instagram and Facebook.
- Instagram and Facebook each got a "For you on Threads" carousel in the last few months. Responding to user grumpiness, Threads said in October it was "listening to feedback" shortly before testing the opt-out switch that's rolling out now.
- Meta could be preparing to open the platform up to EU users. Meta has held off on launching Threads in Europe because of how the region's Digital Markets Act governs the handling of cross-platform data.

Threads finally lets you delete your account separately from Instagram
https://www.theverge.com/2023/11/13/23959709/threads-delete-account-instagram-keep-meta
Nov 13, 2023

- Meta is rolling out a way for you to delete your Threads profile without having to delete your Instagram account, too.
- This new ability to delete *just* your Threads profile addresses an early complaint with the app, which currently requires that you sign up with an Instagram account.
- Mosseri also shared that the platform is rolling out a way to opt out of having your Threads posts featured on Facebook and Instagram.

Meta Allows Ads Claiming Rigged 2020 Election on Facebook, Instagram

https://www.wsj.com/tech/meta-allows-ads-claiming-rigged-2020-election-on-facebook-instagram-309b678d?mod=djemTECH

Nov. 15, 2023

- Meta Platforms META 0.30%increase; green up pointing triangle will let political ads on Facebook and Instagram question the legitimacy of the 2020 U.S. presidential election, one of several changes the social-media company and other platforms have made to loosen constraints on campaign advertising for 2024.
- The company decided to allow political advertisers to say past elections were "rigged" or "stolen" but prevented them from questioning the legitimacy of ongoing and coming elections.
- Executives at Meta made the decision based on free-speech considerations after weighing past U.S. elections in which the results might have been contested by a portion of the electorate, according to people familiar with the issue.
- The updated policy is part of a number of changes Meta has made that might fundamentally alter its influence and reach compared with in past elections, including a move to adjust its algorithm in a way that de-emphasizes organic political content on Facebook, the people said.
- Google's YouTube in June announced that it would stop removing claims that widespread fraud occurred in the 2020 and past U.S. elections. X, formerly known as Twitter, announced in August that it would once again allow political ads after banning them in 2019.
- Katie Harbath, a former Facebook public-policy director who wasn't involved in the decision, said it would be challenging for social-media companies to preach free speech yet ban politicians from questioning the results of the 2020 election, which has become such a significant part of the public discourse.
- Meta's treatment of political ads is taking on added importance in the 2024 race because the company has already said it is reducing the amount of nonad political content Facebook shows users in their feeds. In April, the company said in a blog post that it would take "steps so people don't see several posts about politics in a row."
- With this change, politicians who relied on organic social-media exposure to reach potential voters won't be able to do so in 2024, the people said. As a result, the shift is expected to put a greater emphasis on election ads on Facebook and Instagram, testing Meta's ability to manage the updated policy.
- Contributing to the challenges is Meta's decision to lay off many of its employees who were working on election policy, the people said. The company let many of them go over its several rounds of layoffs in the past 12 months that resulted in 21,000 employees, or nearly a quarter of Meta's workforce, being terminated.
- The effects of those layoffs are being felt, said Pak, adding that her organization has noticed a slower response time from Meta as well as longer waits for election ads to be approved.

Meta announces new breakthroughs in AI image editing and video generation with Emu

https://siliconangle.com/2023/11/16/meta-announces-new-breakthroughs-ai-image-editing-video-generation-emu/

NOVEMBER 16 2023

- The Facebook and Instagram parent has developed new tools that enable more control over the image editing process via text instructions, and a new method for text-to-video generation. The new tools are based on Meta's Expressive Media Universe or Emu, the company's first foundational model for image generation.
- In a blog post, Meta's AI researchers explained that generative AI image generation is often a step-by-step process, where the user tries a prompt and the picture that's generated isn't quite what they had in mind. As a result, users are forced to keep tweaking the prompt until the image created is closer to what they had imagined.
- What Meta wants to do is to eliminate this process and give users more precise control, and that's what its new Emu Edit tool is all about. It offers a novel approach to image manipulation, where the user simply inputs text-based instructions. It can perform local and global editing, adding or removing backgrounds, color and geometry transformations, object detection, segmentation and many more editing tasks.
- To that end, Emu Edit has been designed to follow the user's instructions precisely to ensure that pixels unrelated to the request are untouched by the edit made.
- The Emu Video tool leverages the Emu model and provides a simple method for text-to-video generation that's based on diffusion models. Meta said the tool can respond to various inputs, including text only, image only or both together.

- The video generation process is split into a couple of steps, the first being to create an image conditioned by a text prompt, before creating a video based on that image and another text prompt. According to the team, this "factorized" approach offers an extremely efficient way to train video generation models.
- For now, Meta's research into generative AI image editing and video generation remains ongoing, but the team stressed there are a number of exciting use cases for the technology. For instance, it can enable users to create their own animated stickers and GIFs on the fly, rather than searching for existing ones that match the idea they're trying to convert. It can also enable people to edit their own photographs without using complicated tools such as Photoshop.
- The company added that its latest models are unlikely to replace professional artists and animators anytime soon. Instead, their potential lies in helping people to express themselves in new ways.

Instagram update adds new camera filters and video editing tools for content creators
https://www.engadget.com/instagram-update-adds-new-camera-filters-and-video-editing-tools-for-content-creators-171537564.html?utm_campaign=article_email&utm_content=article-11785&utm_medium=email&utm_source=sg
, Nov 16, 2023
- Instagram is rolling out an app update that is surprisingly robust, bringing a whole bunch of new features to content creators. First and foremost, there's finally some new camera filters, which should shake things up for a while. These filters range from "subtle color edits" to more expressive and stylized options.
- As for video editing, there's a new undo/redo tool that lets you, surprise, undo actions and redo them with the press of a button. Instagram also says it's testing the ability to scale, crop and rotate individual clips as part of the editing process. The audio tools are also getting some love, as you can pull audio clips from a dedicated media hub to accompany a Reel. Followers can remix this content as they see it. If this sounds a lot like TikTok, well, that's because it is.
- If you really want to make something weird, Instagram now allows you to pull any part of a photo or video and turn it into a custom sticker. This also works the other way around, so users can pull eligible content from a favorite creator and turn it into a sticker. This particular tool was aided in development by Meta's custom Segment Anything AI.
- The Retention Chart will offer a moment-by-moment insight into how many people are watching your content, though it's not rolling out for a couple of months. The rest of these tools are available today.

Meta Faces Probe by Italian Watchdog Over Instagram's Branded Content
https://www.wsj.com/tech/meta-faces-probe-by-italian-watchdog-over-instagrams-branded-content-8d319df1?mod=followamazon
Nov. 17, 2023
- Italy's competition watchdog has opened an investigation into whether Meta Platforms has failed to provide adequate information on how to mark branded content and monitor the use of the tool in relation to promotional content on Instagram.
- The Italian Competition Authority, or AGCM, alleged Friday that the company doesn't verify the authenticity of interactions on the social-media platform needed to avoid fake likes and followers of popular users, such as influencers.

How Social Media Is Turning Into Old-Fashioned Broadcast Media
https://www.wsj.com/business/media/a-handful-of-accounts-create-most-of-what-we-see-on-social-media-bdafa8f3?mod=djemTECH
Nov. 17, 2023
- A handful of accounts create most of the content that we see. Everyone else? They play the role of the audience, which is there to mostly amplify and applaud. The personal tidbits that people used to share on social media have been relegated to private group chats and their equivalent.
- The transformation of social media into mass media is largely because the rise of TikTok has demonstrated to every social-media company on the planet that people still really like things that can re-create the experience of TV. Advertisers also like things that function like TV, of course—after all, people are never more suggestible than when lulled into a sort of anesthetized mindlessness.
- In this future, people who are good at making content with high production values will thrive, as audiences and tech company algorithms gravitate toward more professional content.
- Taken together, it's clear Meta is following the broader industry trend of separating social into private channels, and turning what were once social apps into entertainment feeds.
- On these formerly-social platforms, whether content is coming from creators with better equipment and more skills, or Hollywood studios testing the waters, hardly matters. In the end, it will all look remarkably similar to the consumer. It will look, says Daniel Faltesek, a media researcher at Oregon State University, like flipping through

cable channels does, only our thumb on the remote has been replaced by our thumb on the screen of our phone, swiping from one TikTok, YouTube Short, or Instagram Reel to the next.

- A telling indicator is the rise of a new kind of entertainment professional—the "creator."
- Where attention flows, money—and content—must also. In 2023 brands will spend an estimated $6 billion on marketing through influencers—a subspecies of creators—according to Emarketer. Globally, the total addressable market for this kind of marketing is currently $250 billion, according to Goldman Sachs.
- Then there is a new generation of shows that are going straight to TikTok, bypassing even streaming services. "Cobell Energy" is a new TV series that is being serialized on TikTok, Instagram and other social platforms.
- In the wake of the success of YouTube and TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and even LinkedIn are all pushing more and more content made by professionals into our feeds, says Simon Owens, a trade journalist who studies the intersection of traditional media and the growing creator economy.
- By this logic, Instagram's move to copy TikTok, which is in turn encroaching on the turf of YouTube by allowing longer videos, and the increasing dominance of professional content on all three, means they're all turning into TV. Even Threads, the new offering from Facebook parent company Meta, is fast becoming a broadcast medium for news, as Twitter was before it.

Meta Splits Up Its Responsible AI Team
https://www.theinformation.com/articles/meta-breaks-up-its-responsible-ai-team?utm_campaign=article_email&utm_content=article-11738&utm_medium=email&utm_source=sg&rc=hm8aii
Nov. 18, 2023

- Meta Platforms has split up a team responsible for understanding and preventing harms associated with the artificial intelligence technology it's developing, as the company diverts more resources to its generative AI work
- Most employees on the Responsible AI team will move to Meta's generative AI team, formed in February to make generative AI products.
- A Meta spokesperson said other members will move to the company's AI infrastructure unit, which works on the systems and tools to build and operate AI products.
- The reorganization, which was previously reported by Axios, follows a series of shake-ups on the Responsible AI team and raises questions about how Meta will ensure the safety of its AI products outside generative AI, including the algorithms that rank and recommend content in Facebook and Instagram feeds and identify harmful posts on the apps.
- "While the majority of the RAI team will sit in the Gen AI org, it will continue to support relevant cross-Meta efforts on responsible AI development and use."
- To some inside Meta, the move indicated that the company considered the Responsible AI team less of a priority, as the reorganization added more layers between it and Zuckerberg, a former employee said. Meta later disbanded another team it had moved into Social Impact—Responsible Innovation—that was tasked with addressing potential harms tied to Meta's products.
- Meta laid off several product designers and user experience researchers in Responsible AI or moved them to other teams amid widespread layoffs over the past year, according to two people with knowledge of the situation. Several senior employees who worked on AI policy also left the company in recent months

I Tried Meta's Ad-Free Instagram Subscription. This Is What It Was Like.
https://www.wsj.com/tech/personal-tech/i-paid-14-for-a-month-of-ad-free-instagramwas-it-worth-it-bd098391
Nov. 19, 2023

- I no longer see posts marked "sponsored." However, Instagram still suggests some brand-owned accounts and posts from influencers that feature paid partnerships.
- Even with an ad-free Instagram account, you can't escape promotional content. I find myself questioning the very nature of ads.
- After I switched the subscription on, I immediately noticed it was more pleasant to swipe through stories, those ephemeral photos and videos that disappear after 24 hours. Before, Instagram would often serve me two ads in a row. Baby pic, meme repost, ad, ad, travel post, dog vid, ad, ad...and so on. Now I can see friends' updates without promotional interruption.
- Similarly, swiping through the TikTok-style Reels provides an endless stream of random short videos, with nary an ad in sight.
- My main feed's change isn't so dramatic. The official ads are gone. But I still see a fair amount of promotional content from accounts I follow
- But I also continue to see the promotion of posts from accounts I *don't* follow
- Many paid promotions aren't explicitly labeled—as the Federal Trade Commission admonished just this month.

- What about data collection? Meta is clear: If you pay for no ads, your data won't be used for ads. That doesn't mean Meta will stop collecting your data. The company still looks at the accounts you interact with and which posts you view. Meta uses this data to personalize the kind of content it suggests.
- Only people over 18 years old in the European Union, European Economic Area and Switzerland will see the ad-free option on Facebook and Instagram. (If you live in the U.K., you won't.) Ads are paused for European users under 18.
- The subscription offering is expensive and next year, fees will be even higher. Meta will charge extra for additional accounts. If you have Facebook and Instagram accounts, that's potentially upward of $22 a month for both.
- Is the ad-free experience worth more than an Amazon Prime or Netflix subscription? For most, no. If Meta introduced more features for subscribers, such as a persistent chronological feed, less data collection and the option to permanently remove suggested content, I might reconsider.
- It would be great to see the no-ad option come to the U.S. If it did, it would probably have to cost more. In the U.S. and Canada, Meta said it took in about $56 a user in revenue across July, August and September of this year. In the same three-month period, it got $19 per European user.
- Subscriptions in the U.S. are unlikely anyway, unless lawmakers tighten data regulations stateside. A Meta spokesman in the EU said this move was a direct result of an EU privacy law ruling.

Temasek-Backed Chinese Startup Is Augmented Reality's Newest Unicorn
https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-11-20/temasek-backed-startup-is-augmented-reality-s-newest-unicorn
November 20, 2023
- Temasek Holdings Pte-backed Chinese augmented reality startup Rokid Inc. has raised $112 million at a valuation of $1 billion to help expand overseas, the latest to bet on next-generation hardware's ability to bring about a mixed-reality future.
- New investors in the Hangzhou-based company include Chinese online gaming and education service provider NetDragon Websoft Holdings Ltd. Rokid, which has raised close to $200 million so far, said it'll explore AR applications in education and that it expects overseas revenue to exceed domestic sales in 2024, without disclosing any figures.
- For years, global tech companies including Apple Inc., Google and TikTok parent ByteDance Ltd. have launched hardware they hoped would herald a mixed-reality future, with Meta Platforms Inc. also in talks to bring its mixed-reality headset to China through a partnership with Tencent Holdings Ltd. But attempts so far have failed to appeal to a mass audience, due to high price tags, limited content and bulky head gear.

Meta is giving researchers more access to Facebook and Instagram data
https://www.technologyreview.com/2023/11/21/1083760/meta-transparency-research-database-nick-clegg/
November 21, 2023
- Meta is releasing a new transparency product called the Meta Content Library and API, according to an announcement from the company today. The new tools will allow select researchers to access publicly available data on Facebook and Instagram in an effort to give a more overarching view of what's happening on the platforms.
- The move comes as social media companies are facing public and regulatory pressure to increase transparency about how their products—specifically recommendation algorithms—work and what impact they have.
- This new library is a step toward increased visibility about what is happening on its platforms and the effect that Meta's products have on online conversations, politics, and society at large.
- The Content Library will also help the company meet new regulatory requirements and obligations on data sharing and transparency, as the company notes in a blog post Tuesday.
- While all this data is publicly available—as in, anyone can see public posts, reactions, and comments on Facebook— the new library makes it easier for researchers to search and analyze this content at scale.
- Meta says that to protect user privacy, this data will be accessible only through a virtual "clean room" and not downloadable. And access will be limited to approved researchers, who will be required to apply via an independent third-party organization.
- In addition to the new library and API, Meta announced new partnerships to expand on research from 2022 on the connections between social networks and economic mobility.
- Clegg said he wants the product to enable research that, first and foremost, is "meaningful," and he highlighted the current lack of consensus among researchers about the exact impacts of social media—research that has undoubtedly been made more difficult by the lack of public data from social media companies.
- The new library is primarily a database that can be accessed either through a web interface similar to a search engine or through an API where researchers can code their own queries to return large amounts of data. Researchers could,

for example, ask to see all public posts in English about generative AI on February 14, 2023, sorted by most viewed to least viewed.

- Recent moves by regulators, particularly in the European Union, may have pushed Meta's hand with mandates for greater transparency.
- The EU's Digital Services Act (DSA), which went into effect in August, requires that big platforms the size of Meta provide access to real-time data for researchers investigating "the detection, identification, and understanding of systemic risks in the Union." Other regulatory efforts in [Australia](), [Brazil](), [the US](), and elsewhere have attempted to mimic these requirements. In what's known as the [Brussels effect](), tech companies often comply with the strictest standards, usually set by the EU, in every country they operate to avoid fragmentation in their products.
- Researchers looking to access the Content Library and API have to submit information about their institution and research questions to the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, an independent organization at the University of Michigan. Meta says the screening is primarily intended to provide a security check about the groups using the data and their financial interests, not to scrutinize the research questions.
- The application process, though, has already raised some eyebrows. Smitha Milli, a postdoctoral researcher at Cornell Tech who studies the impact of social media, says, "My main question is, Why isn't this accessible to everyone?"—especially since the library only contains publicly available data. Milli adds that it's important to consider the amount of time the application process will add to the research cycle, saying it could be "super limiting."
- (Meta said access to the Content Library was limited to protect user privacy: "There's a big difference between data being publicly available on the platform versus being able to access it programmatically in a way where you can get access to a large volume of that data," said Kiran Jagadeesh, a Meta product manager.)
- It's not clear how the latest product will make progress on those fronts, though Clegg said researchers can pair the Content Library with other projects, like [recommendation system cards](), which combined will give "a much, much richer picture than was ever possible."
- Lena Frischlich, a professor at the Digital Democracy Centre at the University of Southern Denmark, tested the beta version of the Content Library and said her team found the access to multimedia content like reels on Instagram and events on Facebook particularly useful, as well as the new data it provides about view counts.
- Frischlich also says that while the new product is "an important next step toward more transparency," it is just a step. "Data access is still somehow restricted," since not every country is included in the database and only researchers at qualifying academic or non-profit research institutions are granted access.

Instagram Enables All Users To Download Publicly Posted Reels Clips
https://www.socialmediatoday.com/news/instagram-enable-all-users-download-publicly-posted-reels-clips/700640/
Nov. 22, 2023

- Instagram has today announced that all users can now download publicly posted Reels in the app, after initially rolling out the option to U.S. users [back in June]().
- As you can see in these example screens, you'll now see a new "Download" option in the Reels "Share" display if a creator has enabled downloads of their clips. Publicly posted Reels will be downloadable by default, though creators can switch it off if they'd prefer people didn't copy their clips.
- The second image shows how downloaded Reels will be displayed, with an Instagram logo, and the creator's IG handle overlaid on the clip.
- Which, as noted, will make it easier for spammy accounts to take content from IG and re-post it on TikTok, in order to scoop up another few shares and likes for their accounts. Because while it will still have the IG markings on it, most users won't really care, though TikTok's algorithm will reduce the reach of posts with up-front branding, including the IG logo.

Unsealed Meta Lawsuit Reveals Internal Knowledge of Teen Harms
https://www.theinformation.com/briefings/unsealed-meta-lawsuit-reveals-internal-knowledge-of-teen-harms?utm_campaign=article_email&utm_content=article-11758&utm_medium=email&utm_source=sg&rc=hm8aii
Nov. 24, 2023

- Newly unsealed portions of a lawsuit filed by a collection of state attorneys general against Meta Platforms has offered fresh insights into what the company knew about how its apps harm teenage users—and how, on several occasions, senior leaders thwarted measures to promote teen well-being.
- The unsealed passages include material about an internal test conducted in 2021, which showed that after a "test user" followed several Instagram accounts promoting eating disorders, the app's recommendation system pushed the user to follow more accounts related to anorexia.
- An internal presentation from the same year, which is also cited in the suit, notes that teenage users struggle with "constant negative comparisons" on Instagram because of the types of content they are recommended and the fact that "like" counts on their posts are visible to all.

- The lawsuit surfaced an internal email from 2018 showing that Meta considered "The lifetime value of a 13 y/o teen is roughly $270 per teen," undercutting the company's public denials that it places a monetary value on young users.
- A Meta spokesperson said in a statement that the complaint "mischaracterizes our work using selective quotes and cherry-picked documents."

At Meta, Millions of Underage Users Were an 'Open Secret,' States Say

https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/25/technology/instagram-meta-children-privacy.html

Nov. 25, 2023

- Meta has received more than 1.1 million reports of users under the age of 13 on its Instagram platform since early 2019 yet it "disabled only a fraction" of those accounts, according to a newly unsealed legal complaint against the company brought by the attorneys general of 33 states.
- Instead, the social media giant "routinely continued to collect" children's personal information, like their locations and email addresses, without parental permission, in violation of a federal children's privacy law, according to the court filing. Meta could face hundreds of millions of dollars, or more, in civil penalties should the states prove the allegations.
- "Within the company, Meta's actual knowledge that millions of Instagram users are under the age of 13 is an open secret that is routinely documented, rigorously analyzed and confirmed," the complaint said, "and zealously protected from disclosure to the public."
- Now the unsealed complaint, filed on Wednesday evening, provides new details from the states' lawsuit. Using snippets from internal emails, employee chats and company presentations, the complaint contends that Instagram for years "coveted and pursued" underage users even as the company "failed" to comply with the children's privacy law.
- The unsealed filing said that Meta "continually failed" to make effective age-checking systems a priority and instead used approaches that enabled users under 13 to lie about their age to set up Instagram accounts.
- It also accused Meta executives of publicly stating in congressional testimony that the company's age-checking process was effective and that the company removed underage accounts when it learned of them — even as the executives knew there were millions of underage users on Instagram.
- In a statement on Saturday, Meta said that it had spent a decade working to make online experiences safe and age-appropriate for teenagers and that the states' complaint "mischaracterizes our work using selective quotes and cherry-picked documents."
- Meta said it would like to see federal legislation that would require "app stores to get parents' approval whenever their teens under 16 download apps" rather than having young people or their parents supply personal details like birth dates to many different apps.
- The lawsuit argues that Meta elected not to build systems to effectively detect and exclude such underage users because it viewed children as a crucial demographic — the next generation of users — that the company needed to capture to assure continued growth.
- Meta had many indicators of underage users, according to the Wednesday filing. An internal company chart displayed in the unsealed material, for example, showed how Meta tracked the percentage of 11- and 12-year-olds who used Instagram daily, the complaint said.
- Meta also knew about accounts belonging to specific underage Instagram users through company reporting channels. But it "automatically" ignored certain reports of users under 13 and allowed them to continue using their accounts, the complaint said, as long as the accounts did not contain a user biography or photos.
- In one case in 2019, Meta employees discussed in emails why the company had not deleted four accounts belonging to a 12-year-old, despite requests and "complaints from the girl's mother stating her daughter was 12," according to the complaint. The employees concluded that the accounts were "ignored" partly because Meta representatives "couldn't tell for sure the user was underage," the legal filing said.

PATENT DROP EMAIL

NOV. 27, 2023

- Google's Computerized Glasses: Google files a patent application for computerized glasses with an embedded automated assistant that adapts suggestions based on user gaze. Another patent involves a head-mounted device for tracking screen time using eye tracking cameras.
- Meta's Reverse Pass-Through Glasses: Meta files a patent for "reverse pass-through glasses" for AR and VR devices, allowing an external viewer to see the user's eyes in real-time. This aims to enhance social co-presence and compete with a similar feature in Apple's upcoming headset.
- Snap's AR/VR Enabled Contact Lens: Snap explores the idea of an "AR/VR enabled contact lens" that can stream virtual content, switch between VR and AR based on environmental conditions, and may include features like tiny cameras for video recording.

- Apple's Improved Earphone Stability: Apple seeks a patent for improving earphone stability, introducing anti-slip mechanisms such as protruding anchors and regional friction zones to enhance the fit within the wearer's ear.

Meta Loses Bid to Push FTC Into Court on Privacy Deal

November 27, 2023

- A US District judge has denied Meta Platforms' bid to challenge in court the US Federal Trade Commission's plan to revise a 2020 privacy settlement with the social media company.
- As part of the 2020 deal, Meta was fined $5 billion and agreed to make changes to its privacy controls. However, the FTC subsequently accused the company of violating the agreement, and took steps to amend it. The changes the agency wants to make include restricting Meta's ability to make money from data collected on users under the age of 18.
- According to Bloomberg, US District Judge Timothy Kelly rejected Meta's bid to force the agency into court, finding that the court did not have jurisdiction on the matter. Meta plans to appeal the ruling. "Today's decision does not address the substance of the FTC's allegations, which are without merit," Meta spokesperson Christopher Sgro told the publication.

TikTok Ignited a Frenzy for Short Videos. Now It Wants Longer Ones

Nov. 27, 2023

- YouTube, Instagram and other apps have spent years trying to compete against the TikTok juggernaut by offering short videos resembling the 15-second clips that made TikTok famous. Now TikTok is stepping up a push to get its creators to make longer videos like the ones found on other apps.
- In late October, TikTok invited dozens of creators to its New York office for a private event aimed at mobilizing them to create more videos at least a minute long. TikTok executives told the creators that by embracing longer videos, they can make more money and have more time to get their messages out, according to a person who attended the event. To drive that message home, TikTok told creators that users are now spending half their time on the app watching content that's longer than a minute. And over the past six months, creators who post videos longer than a minute have five times the growth rate in followers of those who post only short videos.
- Platforms don't want to be seen as one-trick ponies, said Amanda Grant, global head of social at GroupM, the world's largest ad-buying agency. "When you find yourself in a situation where you're really strong in one area, and you see growth there, what's your next big bet and how can you capture different types of attention?" she said.
- But just as some of those apps have generated backlashes among die-hard fans who don't want to see them copying rivals, TikTok could find resistance among creators and users who prefer the app as it used to be.
- TikTok's push for long-form videos comes at a time when the app has been hunting for new sources of revenue to keep up its growth in the years to come, including livestreaming and shopping. As sensational as TikTok's ads business is—the app is likely on track to generate about $20 billion in revenue this year for its Chinese parent company, ByteDance, The Information reported last week—it has limitations.
- Short-form videos offer fewer opportunities to place ads than long ones do. Individual clips are too brief to have ads in the middle, and jamming too many ads between separate videos can frustrate users, prompting them to swipe past the videos. Those limitations are a big reason why Instagram has struggled to make its TikTok competitor, Reels, an advertising powerhouse. Longer videos could also increase the amount of time people spend on the platform, which is attractive to advertisers.
- So far, TikTok hasn't begun inserting ads into longer videos on its app, though some believe it's just a matter of time before it does. A TikTok spokesperson didn't have a comment for this story.
- Over the past several years, TikTok has gradually increased the limit on the length of videos. In July 2021, it bumped that length to three minutes from one minute. In February 2022, it more than tripled the limit to 10 minutes. And last month, it began testing 15-minute videos with select users in certain countries.
- That's the same time limit YouTube imposes by default for its users (to upload longer ones, users have to go through a verification process). Last year, TikTok also began testing another YouTube-like feature: full-screen horizontal videos, a big departure from the vertically oriented videos it is known for.
- New screens offer TikTok more advertising opportunities and a chance to reach new users.
- According to people familiar with TikTok's strategy, the push into longer videos, along with TikTok's recent emphasis on e-commerce and livestreaming, is straight out of the playbook of Douyin, TikTok's sister app in China, which ByteDance also owns. TikTok tends to adopt what's worked on Douyin, but it does so a few years later. On Douyin, for example, longer videos are already popular, the people said.

- It's hard to predict whether TikTok's push for longer videos, should it be successful, will affect the regulatory pressures it is facing in the U.S. Lawmakers have called for a national ban of the app, decrying it as a national security threat and a tool for Chinese Communist Party propaganda (TikTok has denied those accusations).
- For one thing, the app has successfully conditioned its users to swipe quickly to get to the next clip in their feeds, said Koval. "They've trained viewers that this is a rapid-fire, dopamine slot machine," he said. "Pull, pull, pull."
- Many of TikTok's creators gravitated toward its short-form videos because they don't require special camera equipment or hours of video editing, while longer videos require more time to produce and conceptualize.
- In its presentation to creators last month, TikTok highlighted a few genres that perform best for longer videos, including tutorials, vlogs, challenges, commentary and "storytime," a catchall term for a type of video where someone gives an often long and entertaining recap of something that happened to them. TikTok also gave creators some tips for how to craft "effective hooks" to draw viewers into their videos, such as teasing out what they plan to say to encourage people to keep watching.
- TikTok is also giving a financial incentive to creators to make longer clips: In December, it will discontinue its original Creator Fund in the U.S. and other countries, instead encouraging creators to switch to a new version, the Creativity Program, which only rewards videos that are longer than a minute.

Instagram's Algorithm Delivers Toxic Video Mix to Adults Who Follow Children
https://www.wsj.com/tech/meta-instagram-video-algorithm-children-adult-sexual-content-72874155?mod=followamazon
Nov. 27, 2023
- The Meta Platforms META 1.89%increase; green up pointing triangle-owned social app does the same thing for users its algorithm decides might have a prurient interest in children, testing by The Wall Street Journal showed.
- Instagram's system served jarring doses of salacious content to those test accounts, including risqué footage of children as well as overtly sexual adult videos—and ads for some of the biggest U.S. brands.
- The Journal set up the test accounts after observing that the thousands of followers of such young people's accounts often include large numbers of adult men, and that many of the accounts who followed those children also had demonstrated interest in sex content related to both children and adults. The Journal also tested what the algorithm would recommend after its accounts followed some of those users as well, which produced more-disturbing content interspersed with ads.
- In a stream of videos recommended by Instagram, an ad for the dating app Bumble appeared between a video of someone stroking the face of a life-size latex doll and a video of a young girl with a digitally obscured face lifting up her shirt to expose her midriff. In another, a Pizza Hut commercial followed a video of a man lying on a bed with his arm around what the caption said was a 10-year-old girl.
- The Canadian Centre for Child Protection, a child-protection group, separately ran similar tests on its own, with similar results.
- Meta said the Journal's tests produced a manufactured experience that doesn't represent what billions of users see.
- The company declined to comment on why the algorithms compiled streams of separate videos showing children, sex and advertisements, but a spokesman said that in October it introduced new brand safety tools that give advertisers greater control over where their ads appear, and that Instagram either removes or reduces the prominence of four million videos suspected of violating its standards each month.
- Companies whose ads appeared beside inappropriate content in the Journal's tests include Disney, Walmart, online dating company Match Group, Hims, which sells erectile-dysfunction drugs, and The Wall Street Journal itself. Most brand-name retailers require that their advertising not run next to sexual or explicit content.
- "Our systems are effective at reducing harmful content, and we've invested billions in safety, security and brand suitability solutions," said Samantha Stetson, a Meta vice president who handles relations with the advertising industry. She said the prevalence of inappropriate content on Instagram is low, and that the company invests heavily in reducing it.
- Following what it described as Meta's unsatisfactory response to its complaints, Match began canceling Meta advertising for some of its apps, such as Tinder, in October. It has since halted all Reels advertising and stopped promoting its major brands on any of Meta's platforms. "We have no desire to pay Meta to market our brands to predators or place our ads anywhere near this content," said Match spokeswoman Justine Sacco.
- The Journal reporters set up the Instagram test accounts as adults on newly purchased devices and followed the gymnasts, cheerleaders and other young influencers. The tests showed that following only the young girls triggered Instagram to begin serving videos from accounts promoting adult sex content alongside ads for major consumer brands, such as one for Walmart that ran after a video of a woman exposing her crotch.
- When the test accounts then followed some users who followed those same young people's accounts, they yielded even more disturbing recommendations. The platform served a mix of adult pornography and child-sexualizing material, such as a video of a clothed girl caressing her torso and another of a child pantomiming a sex act.

- Experts on algorithmic recommendation systems said the Journal's tests showed that while gymnastics might appear to be an innocuous topic, Meta's behavioral tracking has discerned that some Instagram users following preteen girls will want to engage with videos sexualizing children, and then directs such content toward them.
- "Niche content provides a much stronger signal than general interest content," said Jonathan Stray, senior scientist for the Center for Human-Compatible Artificial Intelligence at the University of California, Berkeley.
- Current and former Meta employees said in interviews that the tendency of Instagram algorithms to aggregate child sexualization content from across its platform was known internally to be a problem. Once Instagram pigeonholes a user as interested in any particular subject matter, they said, its recommendation systems are trained to push more related content to them.
- Preventing the system from pushing noxious content to users interested in it, they said, requires significant changes to the recommendation algorithms that also drive engagement for normal users. Company documents reviewed by the Journal show that the company's safety staffers are broadly barred from making changes to the platform that might reduce daily active users by any measurable amount.
- Part of the problem is that automated enforcement systems have a harder time parsing video content than text or still images. Another difficulty arises from how Reels works: Rather than showing content shared by users' friends, the way other parts of Instagram and Facebook often do, Reels promotes videos from sources they don't follow.
- In an analysis conducted shortly before the introduction of Reels, Meta's safety staff flagged the risk that the product would chain together videos of children and inappropriate content, according to two former staffers. Vaishnavi J, Meta's former head of youth policy, described the safety review's recommendation as: "Either we ramp up our content detection capabilities, or we don't recommend any minor content," meaning any videos of children.
- At the time, TikTok was growing rapidly, drawing the attention of Instagram's young users and the advertisers targeting them. Meta didn't adopt either of the safety analysis's recommendations at that time, according to J.
- Social-media platforms and digital advertising agencies often describe inappropriate ad placements as unfortunate mistakes. But the test accounts run by the Journal and the Canadian Centre for Child Protection suggest Meta's platforms appeared to target some digital marketing at users interested in sex.
- The Journal informed Meta in August about the results of its testing. In the months since then, tests by both the Journal and the Canadian Centre for Child Protection show that the platform continued to serve up a series of videos featuring young children, adult content and apparent promotions for child sex material hosted elsewhere.
- Meta hasn't offered a timetable for resolving the problem or explained how in the future it would restrict the promotion of inappropriate content featuring children.
- Through its own tests, the Canadian Centre for Child Protection concluded that Instagram was regularly serving videos and pictures of clothed children who also appear in the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's digital database of images and videos confirmed to be child abuse sexual material. The group said child abusers often use the images of the girls to advertise illegal content for sale in dark-web forums.
- he group has raised concerns about the ability of Meta's algorithms to essentially recruit new members of online communities devoted to child sexual abuse, where links to illicit content in more private forums proliferate.

Meta Pauses Quest 3 Elite Battery Strap Sales Amid Widespread Charging Fault
https://www.roadtovr.com/quest-3-elite-battery-strap-pause/
Nov 28, 2023
- Meta paused shipments of its Elite Strap with Battery for Quest 3 amid widespread user reports of a charging fault that renders the battery useless. Meta says it's now manufacturing new battery straps that fixes the defect, and that replacements are being handled on a case-by-case basis.
- At the time, Meta Support told *Road to VR* that replacing faulty units with a fresh one "may not necessarily resolve the problem," which ostensibly pointed either to a hardware fault or an issue with the Elite Battery Strap's firmware.
- A Meta spokesperson has now confirmed with *Road to VR* that it has temporarily paused sales of the device while it manufactures new ones without the fault, which the company says was indeed related to the device's firmware.
- Meta says it's not recalling the device as such, but rather replacing affected units on a case-by-case basis, and that it's working with retailer partners to stock new units "as soon as possible."
- In the meantime, official Meta retail partners Target and Best Buy have completely removed listings for the device. Listings are still available on a few retailers, including Amazon and directly through Meta, albeit marked as 'out of stock' with no indication when new stock will ship. We've reached out to several major retailers for a quote on availability, and will update this article when/if we hear back.
- For now, you may still find the odd Elite Strap with Battery for Quest 3 still on the store shelves at places such as Best Buy, although some Reddit users have reported being unable to actually buy units in-person as late as last week, as stores weren't allowed to sell them. Until new stock arrives, users should be aware they potentially have a faulty unit.
- That said, many users haven't experienced the fault at all, so it's still not clear what behavior can set it off. Whatever the case, US consumers have a one-year warranty to replace Meta devices, while EU consumers have two years to

do so. If you have issues with your Elite Strap with Battery for Quest 3, the company suggests reaching out to Meta Support for troubleshooting and/or replacement.

- This isn't the first time Meta faced manufacturing issues with the Elite Strap line. Released for Quest 2 in 2020, both the Elite Strap and Elite Strap with Battery suffered premature breakage due to design issues that caused the device's plastic struts to spontaneously crack. Meta extended the warranty of both Elite Strap variants once it unpaused sales in late 2020, or around two months after the company initially halted shipments of faulty units.

Durbin, Graham Announce January 2024 Hearing with Five Big Tech CEOs on their Failure to Protect Children Online

https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/press/releases/durbin-graham-announce-january-2024-hearing-with-five-big-tech-ceos-on-their-failure-to-protect-children-online?utm_campaign=article_email&utm_content=article-11815&utm_medium=email&utm_source=sg

11.29.2023

- The Senate Judiciary Committee will hear from CEOs of Meta, X, TikTok, Snap, and Discord on January 31, 2024
- Today, U.S. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) and U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC), Chair and Ranking Member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, announced that the Committee's previously announced hearing on online child sexual exploitation has been rescheduled for January 31, 2024, at 10:00 a.m. and will feature testimony from the CEOs of Meta, X (formerly known as Twitter), TikTok, Snap, and Discord.
- The CEOs of X, Discord, and Snap will testify pursuant to subpoenas issued by the Committee, following repeated refusals over weeks of negotiations by the three Big Tech leaders to testify. The CEOs of Meta and TikTok voluntarily agreed to testify at the hearing.
- **"We've known from the beginning that our efforts to protect children online would be met with hesitation from Big Tech. They finally are being forced to acknowledge their failures when it comes to protecting kids. Now that all five companies are cooperating, we look forward to hearing from their CEOs. Parents and kids demand action."**
- Since the Senate Judiciary Committee's hearing on this issue in February, the Committee has reported multiple bipartisan bills to help stop the exploitation of kids online

Tech's New Normal: Microcuts Over Growth at All Costs

https://www.wsj.com/tech/techs-new-normal-microcuts-over-growth-at-all-costs-b80bb18b?mod=followamazon

Nov. 29, 2023

- Amazon AMZN -2.10%decrease; red down pointing triangle, Google, Microsoft MSFT -1.73%decrease; red down pointing triangle and Meta Platforms have been cutting dozens or a few hundred employees at a time as executives keep tight controls on costs, even as their businesses and stock prices have rebounded sharply.
- The cuts are far smaller than the mass layoffs that reached tens of thousands in late 2022 and early this year. But they suggest a new era for an industry that in years past grew with little restraint, one in which companies are focusing on efficiency and acting more like their corporate peers that emphasize shareholder value and healthy margins.
- "There's a second look at costs, at lines of business, and where investments are going to be next year. The output are these microcuts," said Adam Ward, a founding partner at Growth by Design Talent, a recruiting advisory firm. "This will be a new normal."
- There is a reallocation of resources from noncore areas to projects such as AI rather than hiring new people, said Ward, who was previously a director of recruiting at Facebook and the head of recruiting at Pinterest.
- Facebook's parent, Meta, recently posted its largest quarterly revenue in more than a decade. It laid off 20 people weeks later. Chief Executive Officer Mark Zuckerberg said on an earnings call that the company would continue to operate more efficiently going forward "both because it creates a more disciplined and lean culture, and also because it provides stability to see our long-term initiatives through in a very volatile world."
- Many large tech companies are now handing out budgets to department heads by the quarter instead of the year, said Karena Man, a senior partner at Korn Ferry, an organizational consulting firm. The industry has "traditionally been averse to the B word: budget. It was never part of the culture," said Man.
- The continued belt-tightening has created a lot more demand for part-time or project-based positions instead of full-time workers, said Man. Companies are increasingly using AI to better inform their hiring decisions, such as using the technology to determine which people and skills could be shuffled internally.
- Compensation has stayed steady, but Man said companies are no longer as willing to negotiate with job seekers as they were in 2021, when the companies were bending over backward to attract people.
- Pandemic-fueled growth combined with low-interest rates at the time sent companies on a hiring and expansion spree. Since then, borrowing money has become more expensive. Man doesn't see the trend reversing even if interest rates inch down because investors are demanding more discipline.

- "Everyone's repositioning to doing more with less," said Parthi Loganathan, the founder of Letterdrop, a Y Combinator-backed startup that provides marketing software to tech companies. The chief marketing officers he is used to working with now have fewer resources, but are tasked with meeting more-ambitious goals.
- The 2.1% tech unemployment rate remained below the national rate of 3.9% in October. But job postings for future tech positions have fallen each month since March, according to an analysis from CompTIA.
- "There are no signs there that firms are turning around and saying, 'Hey, we're going to ramp up our hiring,'" said Nick Bunker, director of North American economic research with Indeed. "It's very much still a depressed hiring environment."

Meta's Threads to Launch in Europe in App's Biggest Expansion Since Debut

https://www.wsj.com/tech/meta-threads-europe-launch-98448df5?mod=followamazon&utm_campaign=article_email&utm_content=article-11826&utm_medium=email&utm_source=sg

Nov. 30, 2023

- Facebook parent Meta META -2.41%decrease; red down pointing triangle Platforms plans to launch Threads in Europe in December, according to people familiar with the matter.
- The launch represents Threads' largest market expansion since its debut in Julyand signals the social-media company's commitment to the microblogging service, which rivals that of Elon Musk's X, formerly known as Twitter.
- To comply with those regulations, Meta will give EU users the choice of using Threads purely for consumption without a profile that allows them to make their own posts, one of the people said.
- all Threads users would now be able to delete their accounts on the service without also having to delete the Instagram accounts with which they are associated.
- Threads' market expansion comes after numerous advertisers, including Apple, Disney and IBM, paused their ad spending on X after Musk made controversial comments from his account, including one in which he said an antisemitic post was "the actual truth." Musk on Wednesday said anyone trying to "blackmail" him over advertising money could "go f—yourself."
- The inclusion of the EU could result in approximately 40 million additional monthly users for Threads in 2024, Williamson estimates, based on Meta's reported EU user figures for Instagram and the percentage of Instagram users who have become active users on Threads in other markets. That expansion would be a significant boost for Threads' user base, she said.
- "Launching in Europe would certainly bring more people, creating more conversations and more usage," Williamson said. "But Meta still needs to figure out what Threads is."

Meta Sues FTC on Privacy Move in Challenge to In-House Court

https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-11-30/meta-sues-to-halt-ftc-privacy-move-challenging-in-house-trials

November 30, 2023

- Meta Platforms Inc. sued the US Federal Trade Commissionclaiming its in-house trials violate the Constitution and asked a court to immediately halt the agency's bid to change a 2020 privacy settlement.
- It was the second attempt by the parent company of Facebook and Instagram to block the proceeding in court.
- On Monday, US District Judge Timothy Kelly ruled that the FTCcould move forward with a proceeding to revise the 2020 privacy settlement and that the federal court didn't have jurisdiction over that agreement. Under that deal, Meta agree to pay a $5 billion fine — the biggest levied for a privacy violation — and make changes to its internal privacy checks.
- In May, the FTC accused Meta of continuing to violate its privacy pledges and started an internal proceeding to revise the 2020 settlement. Meta responded by asking Kelly, who had signed off on part of the settlement before it was finalized, to stop the FTC from moving forward and to file a case in federal court.
- The company alleges in the new lawsuit that the FTC violates due process by acting as both prosecutor and judge in administrative proceedings.
- Meta's new lawsuit comes among a series of challenges to the FTC's constitutional structure.
- Other regulators are facing challenges to their constitutionality. On Wednesday, the US Supreme Court heard arguments in a case that could potentially strip the Securities and Exchange Commission of its ability to go before in-house judges to seek multimillion-dollar penalties.

Instagram Threads search now supports 'all languages' in latest update

https://techcrunch.com/2023/11/30/instagram-threads-search-now-supports-all-languages-in-latest-update/

November 30, 2023

- Instagram's Twitter/X rival, Threads, is becoming more competitive with the expansion of its keyword search feature to all markets where the app is available.
- Now, according to Instagram head Adam Mosseri, keyword search will be "supported in all languages."
- That will make the app, now used by nearly 100 million people per month, more useful to a broader, global audience.
- The Threads team has been rapidly iterating on the app in response to user feedback, adding features like a chronological following feed, a web app, a way to view your likes, polls, GIFs, hashtag support (without the hash), an edit button, profile switching and more in the months following its launch.
- The company has also promised a developer API and plans to integrate with ActivityPub, the decentralized social networking protocol that also powers Mastodon and other networks.
- However, Threads has not yet adopted one central feature that drives X: Trending Topics, though it has been spotted in development. In fact, the company seems to want to be a less real-time version of X, as its algorithmic feed often features days-old posts.

US judge blocks Montana from banning TikTok use in state
https://www.reuters.com/legal/us-judge-blocks-montana-banning-tiktok-use-state-2023-11-30/
November 30, 2023
- A U.S. judge late on Thursday blocked Montana's first-of-its kind state ban on the use of short-video sharing app TikTok from taking effect on Jan. 1, saying it violated the free speech rights of users.
- U.S. District Judge Donald Molloy issued a preliminary injunction to block the ban on the Chinese-owned app, saying the state ban "violates the Constitution in more ways than one" and "oversteps state power."
- TikTok users in Montana also filed suit to block the ban approved by the state legislature which cited concerns about the personal data of Montana users and potential Chinese spying.
- Knudsen's office added it was considering its next steps and looks "forward to presenting the complete legal argument to defend the law that protects Montanans from the Chinese Communist Party obtaining and using their data."
- TikTok said in earlier court filings it "has not shared, and would not share, U.S. user data with the Chinese government, and has taken substantial measures to protect the privacy and security of TikTok users."
- Molloy, who was appointed to the bench by Democratic President Bill Clinton, found merit in numerous arguments raised by TikTok and referenced what he termed "the pervasive undertone of anti-Chinese sentiment that permeates" the state's legal case and legislation.
- Molloy said Montana sought to exercise foreign policy authority held by the federal government and the state's action was too sweeping.

TikTok pledges €12B European investment over 10 years as work on Norwegian data center begins
https://techcrunch.com/2023/11/30/tiktok-pledges-e12b-european-investment-over-10-years-as-work-on-norwegian-data-center-begins/
November 30, 2023
- TikTok says it will spend €12 billion as part of an ongoing push to ingratiate itself with European regulators, with the company beginning work on its previously announced Norwegian data center.
- The short-form social video company has been working hard these past few years to convince the world that it's not beholden to its parent company ByteDance in China, efforts not helped by revelations last year that China-based employees could access data for users in Europe and the U.S.
- These commitments have been bundled under an initiative it calls Project Clover, which includes opening local data centers in Europe and introducing new data access and control processes.
- The company's promised €12 billion investment spans the next 10 years, and includes funding not only for three data centers, but ongoing work with a third-party security company called NCC Group which it previously announced would carry out audits on its data controls and practices.
- According to TikTok, it has now taken possession of the first of three buildings at the site, and it will begin installing servers with a view toward migrating European users' data from next summer. The additional two buildings will follow shortly after.

Ahead of 2024 election, Meta worries about lack of information on top-tier nation-state covert operations
https://cyberscoop.com/ahead-of-2024-election-meta-worries-about-lack-of-information-on-top-tier-nation-state-covert-operations/
NOVEMBER 30, 2023

- Foreign governments are likely to continue inauthentic messaging campaigns via phony social media accounts heading into elections around the world in 2024, officials with Meta warn in a new report, particularly Russia, Iran and China.
- As opposed to prior election cycles in the United States, however, the U.S. government has stopped proactively sharing information with Meta and other social networking platforms, cutting off a key source of information regarding major, nation-state influence operations, officials with the company told reporters Wednesday.
- Nathaniel Gleicher, Meta's head of security policy, said U.S. information sharing stopped in July, but declined to discuss the government's motives.
- In July, a federal judge restricted some government agencies and officials from meeting and communicating with social media companies about "protected speech," [the Washington Post reported](#) at the time, causing worry among some about progress on the curbing of coordinated disinformation campaigns on major platforms.
- The report — which first emerged in the wake of the company's sharing of information it had on the 2016 Russian election interference operation — disclosed that Meta had identified and neutralized three covert influence campaigns in the third quarter: two from China and one from Russia.
- "Information sharing between tech companies, governments and law enforcement has also proven critical to identifying and disrupting foreign interference early, ahead of elections," the company wrote in the report.
- Prior to the 2020 election, Meta said it acted on tips from the government to disrupt covert influence operations by [Russia](#), [Mexico](#) and [Iran](#) that targeted the U.S.
- "This type of information sharing can be particularly critical in disrupting malicious foreign campaigns by sophisticated threat actors who coordinate their operations outside of our platforms," the company reported. "While we've continued to strengthen our internal capacity to detect and enforce against malicious activity since 2017, external insights from counterparts in government, as well as researchers and investigative journalists, can be particularly important in detecting and disrupting threat activity early in its planning taking place off-platform."
- Gleicher said that Meta has gotten much better at detecting and removing nation-state covert influence operations that originate and operate from its platform. But more and more, he noted, groups looking to carry out such campaigns are either self-hosting and linking to material, or spreading operations across multiple platforms in hopes they won't easily be shut down.
- "For this small set of sophisticated actors, if they're operating off our platforms, there are a number of times when a tip from government has enabled us to take action against them quickly," he added.

WhatsApp now lets you hide your locked chats behind a secret code
https://www.theverge.com/2023/11/30/23982403/whatsapp-secret-code-hide-locked-chats
Nov 30, 2023
- Instead of having your locked chats folder visible with all your other conversations, you can now hide the chats behind a secret code of your choosing.
- WhatsApp also notes you can choose to have your locked chats appear in your chat list instead at any time.
- Meta is rolling out secret codes starting today, and they'll be available globally in the coming months.

Advertisers Say They Do Not Plan to Return to X After Musk's Comments
https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/30/technology/elon-musk-dealbook-advertisers.html
Nov. 30, 2023
- Advertisers said on Thursday that they did not plan to reopen their wallets anytime soon with X, the social media company formerly known as Twitter, after its owner, Elon Musk, [insulted brands using an expletive](#) and told them not to spend on the platform.
- At least half a dozen marketing agencies said the brands they represent were standing firm against advertising on X, while others said they had advised advertisers to stop posting anything on the platform. Some temporary spending pauses that advertisers have enacted in recent weeks against X are likely to turn into permanent freezes, they added, with Mr. Musk's comments giving them no incentive to return.
- Advertisers are "not coming back" to X, said Lou Paskalis, the founder and chief executive of AJL Advisory, a marketing consultancy. "There is no advertising value that would offset the reputational risk of going back on the platform."
- In recent weeks, more than 200 advertisers had halted their spending on X after Mr. Musk endorsed an [antisemitic conspiracy theory](#) and researchers called attention to instances of [ads appearing alongside pro-Nazi posts](#) on the platform. The company, which has made most of its revenue from advertising, is at risk of losing up to [$75 million](#) this quarter as brands back away.
- In a wide-ranging interview at the event, Mr. Musk apologized for the antisemitic post, calling it "one of the most foolish" he had ever published, but also said that advertisers were trying to "blackmail" him. He singled out Bob A. Iger, Disney's chief executive, who also attended the DealBook Summit.

- Hours later, Linda Yaccarino, X's chief executive, tried to mitigate the damage. In a post on X, she shifted attention to Mr. Musk's apology for associating himself with antisemitism and appealed to advertisers to return.
- Ruben Schreurs, the chief strategy officer at Ebiquity, a marketing and media consulting firm, said Ms. Yaccarino appeared to be trying to get brands to stand with X's views on free speech. But advertisers were unlikely to step in to sponsor the social media platform's goals, he said.
- "It doesn't resonate at all," he said, adding that the spending pauses seemed to be "turning into a termination of advertising on X." Short of a leadership change or a change in control at the company, he added, advertisers were unlikely to consider returning to the platform.
- "You can't with a good conscience make a recommendation to a client that they continue to be a part of" what Mr. Musk has done on X, Mr. Hespos said.
- Among the brands that have been big spenders on X and that have recently halted their campaigns are Apple, Disney and IBM. Other brands have remained, including the National Football League and The New York Times's sports site, The Athletic.
- At the DealBook event on Wednesday, Mr. Musk acknowledged that an extended advertiser boycott could bankrupt X. But the public would blame the failure on brands, he said, not on him.
- Mr. Musk's dismissiveness of advertiser concerns has caused brands to view him as a risky partner, said Steve Boehler, the founder of the marketing management consultancy Mercer Island Group.
- Mr. Musk's "comments suggest an outrageous amount of uncertainty regarding his platform, how he will partner with advertisers and whether he even cares about what advertisers think," said Mr. Boehler, who works with clients who spend $10 million to $500 million on advertising annually. "This is also personal," he added. "Businesses are simply full of people, and people like to be treated well, respected and dealt with with dignity."

TikTok pushes further into streaming with new artist accounts
https://www.theverge.com/2023/11/30/23981397/tiktok-artist-accounts-music-streaming-spotify
Nov 30, 2023
- TikTok on Thursday launched artist accounts. These accounts can be activated by any musician and come with tools to help artists reach new fans and increase engagement with existing ones.
- One of the new features, the Music tab, curates catalogs for artists and automatically adds new music so fans can more easily discover their work. Meanwhile, features like "Behind the Song" offer fans a glimpse into the artist's creative process, revealing what inspired the song and the story behind it.
- The accounts also offer new ways for artists to call attention to their work.
- Many of the new features seem inspired by Spotify, reflecting TikTok's larger push into streaming after launching TikTok Music — its subscription-driven streaming service — earlier this year.
- Meanwhile, just a few weeks ago, TikTok announced the "Add to Music app" feature, which appears to users as an "Add Song" button they can use to quickly save TikTok songs to their Spotify, Apple Music, or Amazon Music playlists.

Top tech firms sign new Government Charter to crack down on online fraud
https://www.independent.co.uk/money/top-tech-firms-sign-new-government-charter-to-crack-down-on-online-fraud-b2455865.html
30 November 2023
- The Government has launched an Online Fraud Charter with 12 major tech companies in a "world-first" initiative to combat online scams, fake adverts and romance fraud.
- Home Secretary James Cleverly hosted representatives from several leading tech companies – including Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat and YouTube – to sign the pledge to tackle internet fraud at Lancaster House in central London on Thursday morning.
- Other firms signing the voluntary agreement include Amazon, eBay, Google, Instagram, LinkedIn, Match Group, Microsoft and X.
- The Charter calls on the firms to introduce a number of measures to better protect users, including verifying new advertisers and promptly removing fraudulent content.
- There will also be increased levels of verification on peer-to-peer marketplaces and people using online dating services.
- The companies have pledged to implement the measures which apply to their services within six months.
- The Charter is backed by a crackdown on illegal adverts and promotions for age-restricted products such as alcohol or gambling which targets children.
- The Home Secretary added: "We're very pleased that you have engaged with us so proactively – that you have enabled us to put in place a world-first, a groundbreaking set of relationships."

- Each of the tech firms will pledge to work closely with law enforcement including creating direct routes to report suspicious activity.
- The Government highlighted that fraud accounts for about 40% of all crime in England and Wales, with data from UK Finance showing that almost 80% of authorised pushed payment fraud originating from social media or fake websites.
- Temporary Assistant Commissioner Nik Adams, of City of London Police, said: "This charter has measures that will empower the public and increase their confidence in using online platforms, knowing that tech companies and policing are working to help keep them safe."
- "Now we have the Charter, it's down to all signatories to match their commitment with meaningful concerted action – putting the right protections in place to reduce fraud and take responsibility to protect millions of consumers on their platforms."
- "The Government must also now utilise their central role and facilitate tech giants and financial institutions to share fraud data generated in their environments.
- "It must not only ensure all signatories are held to account but look at the opportunity to bring big tech together with banks, telcos and internet infrastructure providers to create an impenetrable barrier to protect consumers from online organised crime.
- "The next government must prioritise the glaring need for regulation in the domains and online advertising sectors or fraudsters will continue to flourish.

Federal Judge Halts Montana TikTok Ban
https://www.theinformation.com/briefings/federal-judge-halts-montana-tiktok-ban?utm_campaign=%5BTI-AM%5D+The+Informat&utm_content=131&utm_medium=email&utm_source=cio&utm_term=32&rc=hm8aii
30 November 2023
- A federal judge in Montana issued a preliminary injunction on Thursday to stop the state's ban of TikTok from taking effect at the beginning of next year.
- The judge, Donald Molloy, ruled that the ban "likely violates the First Amendment" because it deprives Montana users of communicating by their preferred means of speech.
- Montana had banned the app over national security concerns stemming from TikTok's Chinese parent company ByteDance, along with concerns about "dangerous activities" on the platform.
- the preliminary injunction is an important victory for TikTok. The ByteDance-owned app is facing fresh political pressure after lawmakers such as Republican Sen. Marco Rubio accused the app of encouraging antisemitism.
- "The current record leaves little doubt that Montana's legislature and Attorney General were more interested in targeting China's ostensible role in TikTok than with protecting Montana consumers," Molloy wrote in the ruling.

Russia, Iran and China Are Top Sources for Fake Accounts, Meta Says
https://www.theinformation.com/briefings/russia-iran-and-china-are-top-sources-for-fake-accounts-meta-says?utm_campaign=%5BTI-AM%5D+The+Informat&utm_content=131&utm_medium=email&utm_source=cio&utm_term=32&rc=hm8aii
30 November 2023
- Meta Platforms for the first time identified the most common countries that are sources of fake accounts targeting people in other countries as part of coordinated campaigns to manipulate public opinion.
- In its quarterly report on adversarial threats, Meta said the most common homes for the accounts it removed were Russia, Iran and China, in that order.
- This activity includes content that, for example, defended China's human rights record and attacked critics of the Chinese government.
- Meta said it would continue sharing information on foreign interference with other social media networks, researchers and governments.
- In a press briefing on Wednesday, the company confirmed the U.S. government had paused briefings on foreign influence campaigns since July but declined to speculate about why. NBC News earlier reported on the pause.
- In the briefing, Meta also defended its decision to allow political advertisers to question the legitimacy of past elections but not current or future elections. It said permitting the latter could amount to voter suppression.

Meta Says There's Been No Downside to Sharing AI Technology
https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-12-01/meta-says-there-s-been-no-downside-to-sharing-its-ai-technology?leadSource=uverify%20wall
November 30, 2023
- Meta Platforms Inc. executives, speaking at an event Thursday, said there's been no major drawbacks to openly sharing its AI technology, even as many peers take the opposite approach.

- Over the past few months, Meta has been releasing open-source versions of its large language models — the technology behind AI chatbots like ChatGPT. The idea is to keep those models free and then gain an advantage by building products and services on top of them, executives said at an event for the company's AI research Lab FAIR.
- But staying open has its advantages. Meta can rely on thousands of developers across the world to help enhance its AI models. That means the technology could potentially improve at a faster rate than if the company was only using its own researchers.
- "If you do this in secret, you fall behind," LeCun said.
- The recent turmoil at ChatGPT-creator OpenAI has accelerated a global debate about the evolution of artificial intelligence, and whether companies should be more transparent about their approaches in developing a potentially game-changing technology.
- By providing free access to its large language models, which require massive amounts of computing power, Meta is allowing smaller companies and developers to build AI tools.
- Meta does plan to charge some big companies, such as Microsoft, Amazon.com Inc. or Alphabet Inc.'s Google, for using its large language models, Chief Executive Officer Mark Zuckerberg told investors earlier this year. "I don't think that that's going to be a large amount of revenue in the near term, but over the long term, hopefully that can be something," he said.
- Meta's FAIR team, short for Fundamental Artificial Intelligence Research, was started a decade ago and now has more than 400 researchers spread across North America and Europe. Recently, the team has been focusing on finding product applications for its research. In January, Meta created a new AI product group focused solely on infusing AI technologies into its products.

The Rise of AI-Powered Stars: Big Money and Risks
https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/ai-powered-stars-youtube-meta-1235683894/
NOVEMBER 30, 2023
- The AI wrote the song and re-created T-Pain's voice so that a user could include it as a personal soundtrack to a video. YouTube also has signed John Legend, Demi Lovato and Charlie Puth, among others, for its Dream Track tech.
- Facebook and Instagram owner Meta has beta-launched a cast of AI "characters," all of which share the likenesses of such celebrities as Tom Brady, Snoop Dogg and MrBeast.
- And tech startups, like the AI-focused firm Soul Machines (which counts SoftBank among its investors), are launching AI-powered celebrity avatars, letting users interact and chat with "digital twins" of people like boxer Francis Ngannou, K-pop star Mark Tuan or golfer Jack Nicklaus.
- As the Hollywood guilds grapple with the potential for generative AI to transform film and TV production, tech firms are using the power of celebrities to introduce the underlying technology to the masses.
- For now, the AI-powered celebrity likenesses (be they look-alike chatbots or sound-alike audio) are in the experimental stage, but that is expected to change in the coming months, as Meta's chatbots and YouTube's Dream Track expand (Meta, for example, has secured voice recordings of many participating stars, so its chatbots likely will be able to talk to users in the future outside of text). "Look at the number of celebrities today who are creating products, brands and ecommerce stores as an extension of their social media reach," says Greg Cross, CEO of Soul Machines. "So this becomes just another facet for digital engagement."
- But the tech also raises thorny questions about identity, intellectual property, compensation and safeguards. A film studio owns the IP of a movie, and the script is written in advance. With this AI-generated content the technology writes everything on the fly. Contracts can stipulate compensation, but that isn't so simple when a celebrity's likeness or voice is used to train a model.
- And in an industry where the famous and powerful so zealously guard their images, how confident can they be that their AI-generated counterparts won't go off the rails?
- The compensation piece is in some ways simpler — at least for now. Meta is paying some of the celebrities signed on to its chatbot project millions of dollars each over the course of the deal, sources confirm. YouTube, too, is contemplating how to pay musicians who participate (it already shares revenue with artists whose songs are used in videos, so one could see a similar model applying to AI-generated tunes based on the style of a real artist).
- Things get more complicated when you think about the future. What happens when these deals are up and one side or the other opts not to renew? The personal data used to train the AI models can be removed, but only to a point, sources say.
- "It's like saying, 'You should go watch the movie *Star Wars* and then forget that you ever saw the movie.' It's just not possible," one source familiar with the discussions says. "You can remove data, but there are still remnants of that data that have informed how the system is trained."
- "These models are going to essentially require some kind of perpetual license," the source adds. "And that is something I don't know that big tech companies are contemplating and or are prepared to deal with."

- Then there's the question of guardrails. It's one thing to have an AI John Legend singing about your dog, or an AI Tom Brady (sorry, his character's name is "Bru") talking about his Super Bowl picks. But what's to stop the misuse of these AIs to issue threats or say things unbecoming of their real-life doppelgängers?
- The guardrails exist, but they are imperfect. "We specifically train them so they won't use bad language or get into offensive subject matter," Cross says.
- "That sort of scenario is probably going to happen with anything like this because you can't train for everything, and a chatbot essentially based on one of these LLMs [large language models] is based on being able to answer everything according to its training," Purcell says.
- "There's only so much that you can definitively get these things to guardrail around, and if you mess with it enough, it'll start to kind of break," the source says.
- A senior media exec grimly predicts AI-driven models are "going to be everywhere, anyway" and it'd be better if companies establish a "rules-based place" to experiment. "Media companies need to learn from their mistakes and create safe spaces for this stuff," this exec adds, lest they hand control entirely to big tech.
- The proliferation of celebrity AI avatars, chatbots and music experiments suggest that many famous people are already accepting of that future.
- "I think there's a lot of work that is required of any of the big tech companies that are developing these and it's going to require a lot of ongoing maintenance and tracking of it," the source familiar with big tech's efforts says. "And I don't know that it will ever be, quote, perfect."

Steam Link can now wirelessly stream VR games to your Meta Quest headset
https://www.theverge.com/2023/11/30/23982839/steam-link-meta-quest-headset-stream-vr-games
Nov 30, 2023
- Valve's Steam Link app, which lets you stream games from your Steam library to another device, is out now for the Meta Quest 2, 3, and Pro headsets, according to a news post from Valve.
- Having Steam Link available on Quest devices means that you can more easily play your VR games wirelessly.
- To stream your games to your headset from Steam Link, Valve says you'll need "a router with a wired connection to your PC" and "a 5GHz WiFi network for your headset." Steam and SteamVR will need to be installed and running on your PC (which needs to be a PC on Windows 10 or newer). The company recommends a computer with at least 16GB of RAM and an Nvidia GPU ("RTX2070 or better"). And, of course, you'll need to install Steam Link on your Meta Quest device.
- And if you've been eyeing a few VR games on Steam as of late, Valve will be hosting a "VR Fest" on Steam from December 4th through December 11th where you can grab some games on sale.

Meta Is Struggling to Boot Pedophiles Off Facebook and Instagram
https://www.wsj.com/tech/meta-facebook-instagram-pedophiles-enforcement-struggles-dceb3548?mod=followamazon
Dec. 1, 2023
- Meta META -2.24%decrease; red down pointing triangle Platforms has spent months trying to fix child-safety problems on Instagram and Facebook, but it is struggling to prevent its own systems from enabling and even promoting a vast network of pedophile accounts.
- The social-media giant set up a child-safety task force in June after The Wall Street Journal and researchers at Stanford University and the University of Massachusetts Amherst revealed that Instagram's algorithms connected a web of accounts devoted to the creation, purchasing and trading of underage-sex content.
- Five months later, tests conducted by the Journal as well as by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection show that Meta's recommendation systems still promote such content.
- The company has taken down hashtags related to pedophilia, but its systems sometimes recommend new ones with minor variations. Even when Meta is alerted to problem accounts and user groups, it has been spotty in removing them.
- The tests show that the problem extends beyond Instagram to encompass the much broader universe of Facebook Groups, including large groups explicitly centered on sexualizing children.
- A Meta spokesman said the company had hidden 190,000 groups in Facebook's search results and disabled tens of thousands of other accounts, but that the work hadn't progressed as quickly as it would have liked.
- Meta recently announced an effort to collaborate with other platforms seeking to root them out. "We are actively continuing to implement changes identified by the task force we set up earlier this year."
- The company said it also has introduced other ways to find and remove accounts that violate its child exploitation policies, and has improved technology to identify adult nudity and sexual activity in live videos.
- The Stanford Internet Observatory, which has been examining internet platforms' handling of child-sex content, credited Meta in a September report with some progress, but said of the connection among pedophiles on Instagram that "the overall ecosystem remains active, with significant room for improvement in content enforcement."

- The Canadian Centre for Child Protection, a nonprofit that builds automated screening tools meant to protect children, said a network of Instagram accounts with as many as 10 million followers each has continued to livestream videos of child sex abuse months after it was reported to the company. Facebook's algorithms have helped build large Facebook Groups devoted to trading child sexual abuse content, the Journal's tests showed.
- Meta in recent years has shifted attention and resources to artificial intelligence, virtual reality and the metaverse. Broad cost cuts over the past year have resulted in the layoffs of hundreds of safety staffers focused on "high severity" content problems, including some child-safety specialists, according to current and former employees.
- Meta said that the company continues to invest in child-safety work, including by assigning a team to find and remove child exploitation material on the platform.
- Meta has been reluctant to significantly limit the systems that present personalized content and user experiences, which have helped make it the world's biggest social-media company. A spokesman said that bluntly restricting or removing features that also connect people with acceptable content isn't a reasonable approach to preventing inappropriate recommendations, and that the company invests in safety to keep its platform healthy.
- Company documents reviewed by the Journal show that senior Meta executives earlier this year instructed the company's integrity team, which is responsible for addressing user safety issues, to give priority to objectives including reducing "advertiser friction" and avoiding mistakes that might "inadvertently limit well intended usage of our products." Those objectives were listed as above traditional safety work focused on harmful content, such as child exploitation, in planning documents viewed by the Journal.
- "It is a given for members of the integrity team that their top priority is keeping the community safe," the Meta spokesman said.
- Meta, like other tech companies, has long had to fight the use of its platform to groom children or trade child-sexual abuse material. The Journal's article in June showed Instagram wasn't just hosting such activities, but its recommendation systems were connecting pedophiles with one another and guiding them to content sellers.
- Users in those groups discuss children in a sexual context, post links to content purported to be about abuse and organize private chats, often via Meta's own Messenger and WhatsApp platforms.
- When a Journal research account flagged many such groups via user reports, the company often declared them to be acceptable. "We've taken a look and found that the group doesn't go against our Community Standards," Facebook replied to a report about a large Facebook group named "Incest."
- Only after the Journal brought specific groups to the attention of Meta's communications staff did the company remove them.
- Meta said revamped software tools will help address such problems by limiting the ability of pedophilic accounts to connect on its platforms. That effort is focused on expanding the use of a technology meant to identify "potentially suspicious adults" by evaluating users' behavior to determine whether they pose a threat to children.
- The technology previously has been used to restrict Facebook or Instagram accounts that Meta's system deemed likely to belong to pedophiles from finding and contacting children. Meta now aims to use it to prevent pedophiles from following one another and forming like-minded groups. The technology aims to restrict the recommendation of accounts and groups that exhibit a range of suspicious behavior.
- For the first time, Meta has begun disabling individual accounts that score above a certain threshold of suspicious behavior, a spokeswoman said.
- "We often wonder, 'Why is it that we can, within minutes, find these massive networks?'" said Leanna McDonald, the center's president. "Why is no one over there dealing with this?"
- Researchers at the Stanford Internet Observatory found that when Meta takes down an Instagram or Facebook hashtag it believes is related to pedophilia, its system often fails to detect, and sometimes even suggests, new ones with minor variations.
- The Stanford group provided Meta with an analysis of groups popular with Instagram's child sexualization community. Five months later, some of the groups it flagged are still operating.
- The Meta spokesman said that taking down groups is complex and time-consuming. The company, he said, has removed 16,000 groups since July 1 for violating child-safety policies.
- Although Meta lets users flag problem content, the Journal's June article showed that its system often ignores or dismisses reports of child exploitation.
- Meta has said its review calls are around 90% accurate. But an internal review by the company in May found that its decisions about user reports of underage sex content were routinely inexplicable.
- Meta employs outside contractors to help moderate content. Its child-safety task force set up in June sent a team to Mumbai, the company's largest hub for the outsourced moderation workers.
- The team found that the moderators weren't adequately trained, and that Meta's IT systems sometimes showed them blank screens instead of the "high severity" content they were supposed to review. In other instances, contract workers were asked to review text in languages they didn't speak.
- Meta acknowledged the shortfalls and said it has made progress on fixing them.

- After the Journal published its findings in June, Meta said it was rethinking the balance between child safety and giving maximal freedom to users.
- An Instagram system designed to help users find new content automatically suggests personalized variants of search terms as a user types them. The Stanford researchers found that to be happening even with search terms that Meta had banned.

Meta faces more questions in Europe about child safety risks on Instagram
https://techcrunch.com/2023/12/01/meta-dsa-rfi-2-child-safety/
December 1, 2023
- Meta has received another formal request for information (RFI) from European Union regulators seeking more details of its response to child safety concerns on Instagram — including what it's doing to tackle risks related to the sharing of self-generated child sexual abuse material (SG-CSAM) on the social network.
- The DSA puts obligations on Big Tech to tackle illegal content — including by having measures and protections in place to prevent misuse of their services. The regulation also has a strong focus on the protection of minors so it's not surprising to see a number of early RFIs made by the European Commission concern child safety.
- The latest Commission request to Meta comes hard on the heels of a report by the WSJ that suggests Instagram is struggling to clean up a CSAM problem it exposed this summer — when it reported Instagram's algorithms were connecting a web of accounts which were being used for making, buying and trading underage-sex content.
- In June, following the WSJ's exposé, the EU warned Meta it faces a risk of "heavy sanctions" if it doesn't act quickly to tackle the child protection issues.
- Now, months later, another report by the WSJ claims Meta has failed to rectify the issues identified — despite the company setting up a child safety task force to try to stop "its own systems from enabling and even promoting a vast network of pedophile accounts", as the newspaper puts it.
- Spotty performance by Meta on tackling the sharing of illegal CSAM/SG-CSAM and failing to act effectively on associated child safety risks could get very expensive for the company in the EU: The DSA empowers the Commission to issue fines of up to 6% of global annual turnover if it finds the regulation's rules have been broken.
- "The Commission is requesting Meta to provide additional information on the measures it has taken to comply with its obligations to assess risks and take effective mitigation measures linked to the protection of minors, including regarding the circulation of SG-CSAM on Instagram. Information is also requested about Instagram's recommender system and amplification of potentially harmful content," the EU wrote in a press release today, announcing its latest intel-gathering step on the platform.
- As well as the possibility of financial sanctions there could be reputational concerns for Meta if EU regulators are repeatedly seen questioning its approach to safeguarding minors.
- This is the third RFI Meta has received since DSA compliance begun to apply on the company — and the second to focus on child safety on Instagram. (The EU has also asked Meta for more details of its handling of content risks related to the Israel-Hamas war; and about what it's doing to ensure election security.)
- So far the EU hasn't announced any formal investigation proceedings under the DSA. But the early flurry of RFIs show it's busy making assessments which could lead to such a step — opening up the risk of penalties down the line should any breaches be confirmed.
- Meta has been given a deadline of December 22 to provide the Commission with the latest tranche of requested child safety data. Failures to comply with RFIs — such as by sending incorrect, incomplete, or misleading information in response to a request — can also attract DSA sanctions.

French government recommends against using foreign chat apps
https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/french-government-recommends-against-using-foreign-chat-apps/
December 1, 2023
- Prime Minister of France Élisabeth Borne signed a circular last week requesting all government employees to uninstall foreign communication apps such as Signal, WhatsApp, and Telegram by December 8, 2023, in favor of a French messaging app named 'Olvid.'
- BleepingComputer discussed the development with French journalists, who clarified that this isn't a ban on using foreign messaging apps but rather a recommendation to switch to locally developed software.
- Olvid supports end-to-end encrypted messages, uses a decentralized infrastructure, and doesn't require a phone number or any other personal data for registration. Hence, it is seen as a more trustworthy option that includes all the key features of its more renowned and widely used competitors.
- Meredith Whittaker, President of Signal, took to Twitter to challenge the vague claims about security vulnerabilities in the app, labeling them unfounded and misleading.
- Security comparisons between Olvid and other messaging apps may be rendered moot due to Olvid's unique distinction of having ANSSI (France's national cybersecurity agency) "first-level security certification."

- The exact reason behind the decision to suggest the use of Olvid within the French government remains unknown, and as French journalist Emile Marzolf told BleepingComputer, not everyone agrees with the PM's instruction.
- Marzolf revealed that during his conversation with the French Digital Department, they expressed dissatisfaction with the directive, finding the promotion of Olvid excessive while also conveying that Signal is an acceptable platform to them.
- Previously, in March 2023, the French government followed the example of many other Western countries to ban the use of the TikTok app on state officials' devices over fears of espionage.

Meta AI unveils 'Seamless' translator for real-time communication across languages
https://venturebeat.com/ai/meta-ai-unveils-seamless-translator-for-real-time-communication-across-languages/
December 1, 2023

- Meta AI researchers announced on Thursday that they have developed a new suite of artificial intelligence models called Seamless Communication that aim to enable more natural and authentic communication across languages — essentially making the concept of a Universal Speech Translator a reality. The models were publicly released this week along with research papers and accompanying data.
- According to the research paper, Seamless is "the first publicly available system that unlocks expressive cross-lingual communication in real-time."
- It combines three sophisticated neural network models to enable real-time translation between over 100 spoken and written languages while preserving the vocal style, emotion, and prosody of the speaker's voice.
- SeamlessExpressive focuses on preserving the vocal style and emotional nuances of the speaker's voice when translating between languages. As described in the paper, "Translations should capture the nuances of human expression. While existing translation tools are skilled at capturing the content within a conversation, they typically rely on monotone, robotic text-to-speech systems for their output."
- SeamlessStreaming enables near real-time translation with only about two seconds of latency. The researchers say it is the "first massively multilingual model" to deliver such fast translation speeds across nearly 100 spoken and written languages.
- The third model, SeamlessM4T v2, serves as the foundation for the other two models. It is an upgraded version of the original SeamlessM4T model released last year. The new architecture delivers "improved consistency between text and speech output," according to the paper.
- The models' capabilities could enable new voice-based communication experiences, from real-time multilingual conversations using smart glasses to automatically dubbed videos and podcasts. The researchers suggest it could also help break down language barriers for immigrants and others who struggle with communication.
- To promote safety and responsible use of the models, they implemented several measures including audio watermarking and new techniques to reduce hallucinated toxic outputs.
- In keeping with Meta's commitment to open research and collaboration, the Seamless Communication models have been publicly released on Hugging Face and Github.
- By making these state-of-the-art natural language processing models freely available, Meta hopes to enable fellow researchers and developers to build upon and extend this work to help connect people across languages and cultures. The release underscores Meta's leadership in open source AI and provides a valuable new resource for the research community.

Meta is expanding child safety measures as government and press reports mount
https://www.theverge.com/2023/12/1/23983955/meta-child-safety-sexual-abuse-explicit-content-eu-senate
Dec 1, 2023

- In a blog post published today, Meta says it's expanding and updating its child safety features aimed at protecting kids — even as reports pile up about how its platforms recommend content sexualizing children.
- In both cases, Meta's recommendation system enabled abusive accounts to find each other, through features like Facebook's "Groups You Should Join," or autofilling hashtags on Instagram. Meta today said it will place limits on how "suspicious" adult accounts can interact with each other: on Instagram, they won't be able to follow one another, won't be recommended, and comments from these profiles won't be visible to other "suspicious" accounts.
- Meta also said it has expanded its list of terms, phrases, and emojis related to child safety and has begun using machine learning to detect connections between different search terms.
- Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg — along with a slate of other Big Tech executives — will testify before the Senate in January 2024 on the issue of online child exploitation.
- In November, EU regulators gave Meta a deadline (that expires today) to provide information about how it protects minors; they sent Meta a new request today, specifically noting "the circulation of self-generated child sexual abuse material (SG-CSAM) on Instagram" and the platform's recommendation system.

- In late November, the dating app companies Bumble and Match [suspended advertising on Instagram](#) following *The Journal*'s reporting. The companies' ads were appearing next to explicit content and Reels videos that sexualized children.

Ousted propaganda scholar Joan Donovan accuses Harvard of bowing to Meta

https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/12/04/joan-donovan-harvard-dismissal-complaint/?pwapi_token=eyJ0eXAiOiJKV1QiLCJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJyZWFzb24iOiJnaWZ0IiwibmJmIjoxNzAxNjY2MDAwLCJpc3MiOiJzdWJzY3JpcHRpb25zIiwiZXhwIjoxNzAzMDQ4Mzk5LCJpYXQiOjE3MDE2NjYwMDAsImp0aSI6IjE3Njkx
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December 4, 2023

- Joan Donovan [claimed in a filing](#) with the Education Department and the Massachusetts attorney general that her superiors soured on her as Harvard was getting a record $500 million pledge from Meta founder Mark Zuckerberg's charitable arm.
- As research director of Harvard Kennedy School projects delving into mis- and disinformation on social media platforms, Donovan had raised millions in grants, testified before Congress and been a frequent commentator on television, often faulting internet companies for profiting from the spread of divisive falsehoods.
- Last year, the school's dean told her that he was winding down her main project and that she should stop fundraising for it. This year, the school eliminated her position. The surprise dismissal alarmed fellow researchers elsewhere, who saw Donovan as a pioneer in an increasingly critical area of great sensitivity to the powerful and well-connected tech giants.
- Donovan has remained silent about what happened until now, filing a 248-page legal statement obtained by The Washington Post that traces her problems to her acquisition of a trove of explosive documents known as the [Facebook Papers](#) and championing their importance before an audience of Harvard donors that included Facebook's former top communications executive.
- Harvard disputes Donovan's core claims, telling The Post that she was a staff employee and that it had not been able to find a faculty sponsor to oversee her work, as university policy requires. It also denies that she was fired, saying she "was offered the chance to continue as a part-time adjunct lecturer, and she chose not to do so."
- Ten days after the donors meeting, Kennedy School dean Doug Elmendorf, a former director of the Congressional Budget Office, emailed Donovan with pointed questions about her research goals and methods, launching an increase in oversight that restricted her activities and led to her dismissal before the end of her contract, according to the declaration. Donovan wrote that the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative's $500 million gift for a new artificial intelligence institute at the university, announced Dec. 7 that year, had been in the works before the donor meeting.
- The filing raises questions about the potential conflict of interest created by Big Tech's influence at research institutions that are called upon for their expertise on the industry.
- Cabalquinto's email added: "By long-standing policy to uphold academic standards, all research projects at Harvard Kennedy School need to be led by faculty members. Joan Donovan was hired as a staff member (not a faculty member) to manage a media manipulation project. When the original faculty leader of the project left Harvard, the School tried for some time to identify another faculty member who had time and interest to lead the project. After that effort did not succeed, the project was given more than a year to wind down. Joan Donovan was not fired, and most members of the research team chose to remain at the School in new roles."
- "When you're doing what looks like academic work as one of the most prominent people in an academic field, the university ought to award that person the protections of academic freedom," said Lessig, an expert on corruption who made inquiries to Harvard's administration on Donovan's behalf. "When she was presenting herself to the world, there was no asterisk at the bottom of her name saying, 'As long as what she says is consistent with the interests of Harvard University.'"
- The Donovan case comes at a time when researchers who focus on social media platforms find themselves under increasing attack. Trump adviser Stephen Miller's legal foundation has sued academic and independent researchers, claiming that they conspired with government agencies to suppress speech, and Republican-led congressional committees have subpoenaed their records, adding to the pressure.
- In addition, Big Tech companies themselves have sponsored research, made grants to some colleges and universities, and doled out data to professors who agree to specific avenues of inquiry.
- The filing asks the federal Education Department's civil rights division to investigate whether Harvard violated Donovan's right to free speech and academic freedom. It asks Massachusetts's charity regulators to examine whether the university deceived donors or misappropriated their funds by retaining millions that Donovan had raised for her research.

- In the documents, Donovan contends that Meta's influence at Harvard goes beyond money and includes deep personal connections. Schrage, for one, earned degrees from Harvard College, the Kennedy School and Harvard's law school.
- Zuckerberg and Facebook's former longtime chief operating officer, Sheryl Sandberg, were Harvard undergraduates, as was Zuckerberg's wife, Priscilla Chan.
- Donovan says in her complaint that Elmendorf emailed her after the October donors' meeting and asked to discuss her Facebook work and "focus on a few key issues drawn from the questions raised by the Dean's Council and my own limited reading of current events."
- He wrote that he wanted to hear from her about "How you define the problem of misinformation for both analysis and possible responses (algorithm-adjusting or policymaking) when there is no independent arbiter of truth (in this country or others) and constitutional protections of speech (in some countries)?"
- Donovan said in the filing that Elmendorf's use of the phrase "arbiters of truth" alarmed her because Facebook uses the same words to explain its reluctance to take actions against false content.
- She explained to Elmendorf that rather than making moral judgments about politics or proclaiming that a vaccine is good or bad, she looked for provable manipulation of platforms, as with fake accounts.
- Though Donovan's contract was supposed to keep her on the job through the end of 2024, her superiors took away her ability to start new projects, raise money or organize large events, she alleges. They kept the money she had brought in, including more than $1 million from Craigslist founder Craig Newmark that he wanted specifically to go to her research project, according to documents quoted in the declaration. Newmark declined to comment.
- The Kennedy School said no money was misused. The Massachusetts attorney general's office said it is reviewing the filing. The Education Department did not respond to a request for comment.

WhatsApp for iOS 23.24.73: what's new?
https://wabetainfo.com/whatsapp-for-ios-23-24-73-whats-new/
DECEMBER 4, 2023
- What's new in this update? WhatsApp is widely rolling out a feature to send original quality media as a file!
- This enhancement finally allows users to quickly share photos and videos with their original quality, without the need of following multiple steps.
- The official changelog mentions that WhatsApp is releasing a feature to start voice chats without ringing everyone in large groups. In addition, WhatsApp is now rolling out new bubbles in chat to help users see missed, ongoing, and completed calls, and the ability to react to status updates using your avatar.

Facebook owner Meta faces $600 mln lawsuit from Spanish media
https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/spanish-media-association-files-598-mln-lawsuit-against-facebook-owner-meta-2023-12-04/
December 4, 2023
- A group representing 83 Spanish media outlets has filed a 550 million euro ($600 million) lawsuit against Facebook owner Meta Platforms, citing unfair competition in the advertising market in a case that could be replicated across the European Union.
- The newspapers argue that Meta's "massive" and "systematic" use of personal data of its Facebook, Instagram and Whatsapp platform users gives it an unfair advantage of designing and offering personalised ads, which they say constitutes unfair competition.
- A Meta source familiar with the matter said the company was yet to receive the legal documents.
- The complainants, including Prisa (PRS.MC) - which publishes Spain's main newspaper El Pais - and Vocento (VOC.MC), the owner of ABC, allege most of the ads placed by Meta use personal data obtained without express consent from clients.
- This, they claim, violates the EU General Data Protection Regulation in force since May 2018 which demands that any website requests authorisation to keep and use personal data.
- "Of course, in any other EU country, the same legal proceeding could be initiated" as it concerns an alleged violation of European regulations, Nicolas Gonzalez Cuellar, a lawyer representing the newspapers, told Reuters.
- Spanish media have scored a victory against Alphabet's (GOOGL.O) Google News service, which the government shut down in 2014 before its reopening in 2022 under new legislation allowing media outlets to negotiate fees directly with the tech giant.
- Following the Spanish case, several countries, such as Canada earlier this year, have imposed regulations designed to make internet giants pay for news.

Zuckerberg Sells First Meta Shares in Two Years After 172% Surge
https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-12-04/zuckerberg-sells-first-meta-shares-in-two-years-after-172-surge

December 4, 2023

- Mark Zuckerberg is selling [Meta Platforms Inc.](#) stock for the first time in two years after the social media giant rapidly rebounded from a tumultuous 2022.
- The Meta co-founder's trust as well as entities for his charitable and political giving unloaded about 682,000 shares worth almost $185 million in November through trading plans, with the latest disclosed Wednesday, according to data compiled by Bloomberg from regulatory filings. That's the first time entities that manage Zuckerberg's fortune have sold shares since November 2021.
- Meta surged 172% this year through the end of November, outperforming all major US tech companies other than [Nvidia Corp.](#) That's helping to maximize the proceeds for Zuckerberg's activities outside Meta, which include venture capital, scientific research and impact investments.
- He's regularly offloaded blocks of Meta stock over the past decade but didn't sell a single share in 2022, when catastrophic quarterly results led to one of the [biggest one-day stock wipeouts](#) and Meta's worst annual performance since its 2012 initial public offering.
- Earlier this year, the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative pledged $250 million to establish a biomedical research hub in Chicago. It previously backed efforts to address the San Francisco Bay area's housing shortage and made early-stage investments to train software developers in Africa.

Threads downloads return to growth as X adds Walmart to its advertiser exodus
https://techcrunch.com/2023/12/04/threads-downloads-return-to-growth-as-x-adds-walmart-to-its-advertiser-exodus/
December 4, 2023

- Recent efforts by Meta to grow Threads' install base have been working. According to a new analysis of app store trends, Instagram Threads is now outpacing X, formerly Twitter, at least in terms of new downloads.
- App intelligence firm [Apptopia](#) indicates that, although Threads' daily downloads had been declining since September, things have shifted in the opposite direction over the past week or so. Specifically, since Thursday, November 23, daily downloads have grown to 620,000 from around 350,000 in early November and around 1 million in early September.
- While the firm estimates that Threads' latest surge is likely due to Meta running ads for its new app, designed to offer a Twitter alternative, it still puts Threads ahead in terms of new downloads of its app compared with X.
- What's more, Threads' gaining traction is coming from outside the U.S. The data indicates that the biggest driver of new downloads for Threads is India, accounting for 11.2% or 9.2 million of the new downloads. The U.S. was in second place, with 7.4% of downloads, or 6.1 million. This trend may not be surprising, as India has been the biggest growth driver for Instagram itself, Apptopia says.
- Meanwhile, the biggest source for new downloads of X also isn't the U.S. Instead, it's Indonesia, followed by India. But combined, the U.S., Indonesia and India added fewer new downloads for X than India alone added for Threads, the firm found.
- Apptopia suggests that the loss of new downloads for X comes from the rebranding, which saw the app now called X losing a lot of momentum in terms of growth. In fact, in late September, [X added the words "formerly Twitter"](#) to its App Store description to help the app better rank in searches for the keyword "Twitter."
- Today, X's future as a business is uncertain as it faces an [advertiser exodus](#)where major brands including Apple, IBM, Disney, Paramount, Comcast/NBCU, Warner Bros., Lionsgate, Sony and, more recently, [Paris Hilton's 11:11 Media](#) and [Walmart](#), have pulled their campaigns from the platform. This came after X owner Elon Musk [said to brands leaving the platform](#) over his antisemitic posts to "go f*** yourself," in a November 29 interview at The New York Times DealBook conference.
- Despite these issues, X has proven itself as a place where news still regularly breaks as was seen with the OpenAI boardroom drama that took place prior to the Thanksgiving holiday in the U.S.
- This came about because X is still the main platform for many news announcements and because Instagram head Adam Mosseri has said [Threads wouldn't amplify news](#), aiming to be a less real-time competitor to X. Last week, Mosseri also added that Threads' [search results also wouldn't be chronological,](#) saying that would create a "substantial safety loophole" as it would allow spammers and bad actors to gamify results by adding relevant words and tags.

Instagram and Facebook Messenger chats are being disconnected this month
https://9to5google.com/2023/12/04/instagram-facebook-messenger-chats-disconnected/
Dec 4 2023

- Meta is beginning the process of disconnecting the ability to have "cross-app chats" with your Instagram contacts via Facebook Messenger and vice-versa.
- No reason has been given for the change, but it may be related to Europe's Digital Markets Act (DMA), which, among other things, includes requirements for large companies to offer interoperability between messaging platforms.

Another of Meta's products, WhatsApp, has already been found to be preparing a "Third-Party Chats" feature that should help comply with the DMA.

- It's possible that Meta is disconnecting this service-specific cross-app chatting feature to better prepare for wider, DMA-compliant interoperability within Messenger. Alternatively, this could simply be another instance of Meta scaling back Messenger, with the app recently losing SMS/MMS capabilities on Android and Meta shutting down Messenger Lite.

TikTok owner ByteDance joins generative AI frenzy with service for chatbot development, memo says

https://www.scmp.com/tech/big-tech/article/3243734/tiktok-owner-bytedance-joins-generative-ai-frenzy-service-chatbot-development-memo-says

Dec 4 2023

- ByteDance, the Chinese owner of TikTok, is working on an open platform that will allow users to create their own chatbots, as the company races to catch up in generative artificial intelligence (AI) amid fierce competition that kicked off with last year's launch of ChatGPT.
- The move aligns with the company's new strategic vision to "explore new generative AI products and how they can integrate with the existing ones", the companywide notice said.
- The social media giant has already been working on its own text-to-image generator similar to Midjourney, according to a person familiar with the matter.
- China's most valuable unicorn has been known for using some form of AI behind the scenes from day one. Its recommendation algorithms are considered the "secret sauce" behind TikTok's success.
- Now it is jumping into an emerging market for offering large language models (LLMs) as a service. Several other tech giants have done the same, including OpenAI, the Microsoft-backed start-up behind ChatGPT. Last month, it started allowing all users to make custom versions of ChatGPT for specific tasks, with no coding experience required.

IBM and Meta Launch New Group to Support Open Approach for AI Models

https://www.barrons.com/articles/ibm-meta-open-ai-models-f33c9110?mod=djem_b_Feature_1252023%2064154%20AM

Dec 05, 2023

- A key debate in the world of artificial intelligence is whether large language models should be proprietary—controlled by their builders—or open source, with contributions from the broader community.
- Some industry leaders, including OpenAI, Microsoft and Google, think it makes more sense to keep models under tighter control. But others, including IBM and Meta, think an open approach makes more sense.
- IBM and Meta have teamed up with a group of more than 50 other companies, research groups and academic institutions to launch the AI Alliance, "a community" focused on advancing "open, safe, responsible AI."
- Other large companies in the group include Intel, Advanced Micro Devices, Oracle, ServiceNow, Sony, SoftBank and Dell Technologies. The group also includes start-ups such as HuggingFace, a marketplace for AI models; Stability AI, which builds open source models; and the AI chip maker Cerebras. Academic members include Yale, UC Berkeley, Cornell, Dartmouth, the University of Illinois and the University of Tokyo, among others. NASA, the National Science Foundation and CERN are members, too.
- In announcing the AI Alliance, the group asserted that "open and transparent innovation is essential to empower a broad spectrum of AI researchers, builders and adopters with the information and tools needed to harness these achievements in ways that prioritize safety, diversity and economic opportunity and benefits to all."
- The AI Alliance said it plans to develop "benchmarks and evaluation standards, tools and other resources" to help develop AI systems. Among other things, the group says it wants to help create multilingual models that can "help address society-wide challenges in climate, education and beyond."
- There's logic in having IBM and Meta as leaders of the group. Meta has made its Llama 2 large language model open source, free to use for both research and commercial purposes. IBM has a long history in open source software; the company owns Red Hat, which provides services for Linux system users.