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Digital Wildfire of Disinformation in the Netherlands

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Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:

2021

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Manuvie, R., & van Dorssen, M. (2021). *Digital Wildfire of Disinformation in the Netherlands*. The London Story. https://thelondonstory.org/wp-content/uploads/Digital-Wildfire-of-Disinformation-in-the-Netherlands_Final.pdf

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DIGITAL WILDFIRE OF DISINFORMATION

In the Netherlands

Digital Wildfire of Disinformation in the Netherlands



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Editor and reviewers: Alena Kahle and Katherine Waters

Design and Layout: Eshant Gandhi

Citation: Manuvie, R; van Dorssen M.; 'Digital Wildfire of Disinformation in Dutch Elections', St. The London Story, The Hague, Netherlands, July 2021.

Year of Publication: 2021

Published and distributed by: Foundation London Story

ISBN: 9789464370683

Email: info@thelondonstory.org | URL: www.thelondonstory.org

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Acknowledgement:

Authors would like to thank the researchers involved in identifying, labeling and flagging the material shared in this report. They include Shawintala Banwarie, Noortje Assnik, Seth van Nobelen, and Sanne van Merel who have spent many hours finding and flagging toxic misinformation and disinformation for the purposes of this research and for the benefit of humanity. We would also like to thank the developers at Crowd Tangle for creating a powerful tool whereby the information that passes through Facebook can be seen, and for allowing university staff to use it.

Authors would also like to thank the reviewers, including the anonymous reviewers whose timely comments and feedbacks helped improve this report.

Disclaimer:

The material provided in the report was found on Facebook by our researchers and has been included after being fact-checked. The study is a part of the ongoing work of the Foundation on disinformation and hate speech in online environments. The authors of the report are solely responsible for the views expressed in the report.

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Netherlands political party overview

Abbreviation	Political Party	Position	Leader
VVD	People's Party for Freedom and Democracy Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie	Center-right	Mark Rutte
D66	Democrats 66 Democraten 66	Center	Sigrid Kaag
PVV	Party for Freedom Partij voor de Vrijheid	Far-right	Geert Wilders
CDA	Christian Democratic Appeal Christen-Democratisch Appèl	Center-right	Wopke Hoekstra
SP	Socialist Party Socialistische Partij	Left	Lilian Marijnissen
PvdA	Labour Party Partij van de Arbeid	Left	Lilianne Ploumen
GL	GroenLinks GreenLeft	Left	Jesse Klaver
FvD	Forum for Democracy Forum voor Democratie	Far-right	Thierry Baudet
PvdD	Party for the Animals Partij voor de Dieren	Left	Esther Ouwehand
CU	Christian Union ChristenUnie	Center-right	Gert-Jan Segers
Volt	Volt Netherlands Volt Nederland	Center	Laurens Dassen
JA21	Right Answer 2021 Juiste Antwoord 2021	Right-wing	Joost Eerdmans
SGP	Reformed Political Party Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij	Right-wing	Kees van der Staaij
DENK	DENK	Center-left	Farid Azarkan
BBB	Farmer–Citizen Movement BoerBurgerBeweging	Center-right	Caroline van der Plas
BIJ1	BIJ1	Left	Sylvana Simons
50+	50PLUS	Center	Vacant
VSN	Free and Social Netherlands Vrij en Sociaal Nederland	Center	Bas Filippini

Executive Summary

Executive summary

In this report, Foundation the London Story, a diaspora-led think-tank committed to human rights and transnational issues, presents its findings on **how Facebook's business model is enabling COVID-19 “infodemic” in the Netherlands.**

In recent years, headlines have focused on Facebook's role in undermining democratic elections, amplifying hate speech and spreading public health misinformation in large democracies such as India, the US and the European Union. However, less attention has been paid to its effects in smaller countries, particularly those which are not English-speaking. **This is the first analysis of its kind to extensively cover disinformation and misinformation in the Netherlands, and highlight the different roles of political actors, inconsistent platform policies, and social influencers in igniting and sustaining a wildfire of disinformation.**

The study uses three time periods to provide a holistic view of the disinformation problem and how Facebook has contributed to it. The period between 17th March 2019 to 17th March 2021 is used to investigate the growth of political parties on Facebook, particularly through paid Facebook content. The period between 17th March 2020 and 17th March 2021 is used to study the growth of COVID-19 disinformation in Netherlands-based Dutch-language pages and groups. And the period of 17th December 2020 and 17th March 2021 is used to highlight how Facebook's business model allows political parties to push COVID-19 disinformation.

The study confirms that politically motivated social media campaigns that originated in the United States of America influenced the social and political behavior of people in the Netherlands. The study defines this person-to-person transmission of misinformation narratives and content between countries as a “[silent influence](#)” of social media. The role of social media in silently influencing peoples' opinions and breaking down social cohesion is a transnational problem that needs to be addressed in a transnational environment.

Despite Facebook's policy against COVID-19 misinformation and users who support QAnon, weak enforcement in the case of political actors and a lack of appropriate checks contributed to an acceleration (and rationalizing) of COVID-19 disinformation especially during election campaigning period of December 2020 to March 2021.

The study traces 170 public groups and pages, having a total of 1.3 million ‘page likes’. These groups and pages are infested with COVID-19 disinformation and QAnon-related conspiracy content (see [Annex 1](#) for the list of groups and pages investigated). The number of Dutch-language QAnon and COVID-19 pages on Facebook is rising. Between 17th March 2020 and 17th March 2021, Dutch-language pages and groups generated **nearly 21.33 million interactions** and **around 93.13 million video views**. Entities flagged in this report have grown by +188.9% (conspiracy groups) and +155.45% (conspiracy pages) over the year-long time period and have proliferated on Telegram and the MeWe app through actively recruiting on Facebook.

The study highlights how COVID-19 disinformation created distrust in the COVID-19 measures adopted by the Dutch government. In turn, these led to anti-COVID-19 measure protests across the Netherlands, unwillingness towards the use of facemasks in public places, and a hesitancy towards COVID-19 vaccines, as documented by [Eurofound](#) and *Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu* [RIVM](#).

The investigation also found that the official Dutch COVID-19 communication channel has a far lower page following and level of interactions when compared to conspiracy groups and pages on Facebook. While the level of interaction generated by these conspiracy groups and pages was close to 21.33 million between 17th March 2020 and 17th March 2021, **in comparison, the official RIVM channel on Facebook generated only 608,000 interactions.**

Members of the Facebook groups traced during this study organized and participated in sometimes violent anti-lockdown protests across the Netherlands. There were also threats levelled against officials, such as the director of the public health Centrum Infectieziektebestrijding (CIb).

The study shows **Facebook's claim that the company does not make ["any meaningful profits"](#) from political ads is factually incorrect in the Netherlands.** Between 17th March 2019 and 17th March 2021, Facebook's total ad revenue in the Netherlands was approximately 15 million Euros, of which **political ads constituted around 25%, making them the largest contributing group.** The primary Facebook pages of the 18 political parties tracked in the study spent close to 3.3 million Euros on Facebook ads during this time.

The far-right party FvD ranked among the top five Facebook political ad buyers in the Netherlands. In this period the 18 parties we tracked ran a total of 32,125 political ads. Of these, at least 1,095 political ads ran without a disclaimer, in spite of Facebook's Ad policy requirements.

The study found that Dutch far-right parties and their members, actively promote sensationalist content that is not permitted according to Facebook's own ad and community standards. The study further found that towards the run-up to the election far-right actively promoted disinformation on Facebook through both **organically grown content and paid political ads.** These political ads contained COVID-19 disinformation and QAnon styled conspiracy theories which Facebook has specifically committed to remove and reduce. Facebook's approval process clearly allowed these advertisements, and the platform generated revenue from this polarizing content. Over three months, between 17th December 2020 and 17th March 2021, **Facebook earned at least 199,300 Euros through COVID-19 disinformation ads.**

Over a period of 7 weeks (From February 1st 2021 to 21st March 2021), **the team of researchers from St. the London Story flagged 938 posts (including political ads and comments) that violated community standards to Facebook. Only 12 of our flagged posts were deleted.** Despite Facebook's commitment to countering COVID-19 disinformation and removing QAnon content, Facebook's content moderation fails miserably when the content is not in English.

The study findings underscore what Mark Zuckerberg admitted in 2018: the more ["borderline"](#) the content, the more likely it is to receive engagement. Far-right parties consistently receive high engagement on social media. This is not reflective of Dutch society and its political preferences, but of Facebook's algorithms which amplify polarizing narratives. The study also found that Facebook's lack of clear policy on global and transnational issues, such as COVID-19 and climate change, creates an unchecked space in which the unfounded skepticism and denialism of far-right groups flourish. While political parties may differ on issues like climate policy and regulation, the study authors argue that political engagement and advertisements should be evaluated in a context-specific setting. This means that Facebook needs to invest heavily to improve its moderation policy, process, and outcomes.

Facebook maintains it is a community that is representative of human society. The study contend that if this is the case, this community is patriarchal, exclusionary, and saturated with gossip and populist beliefs. The alleged "community" does not reflect the advancement of human morality, and ethics but is over-reliant on an unevolved AI. Facebook is wrong to assert that their online community is representative of human society, as they have done numerous times previously, including in meetings with us. Rather, Facebook's algorithm and business model distort the public sphere, making extreme and polarizing views mainstream in a way that is not representative of the Dutch society.

Key recommendations

For Facebook:

The study recommends that Facebook move beyond the baseline of the [corporate commitments to human rights](#). Rather than relying on "[ethical AI](#)" and a generalized sense of fairness, it should embed its models in universal human rights standards and sustainable development goals. This process should start with inscribing a firm and compulsory human rights commitment into their policy documents.

If Facebook wants to truly represent itself as a "community", it should take moral grounding and critical legal responsibility to ensure that its platforms channel life-saving information instead of spreading life-threatening noise, be it regarding health, society or otherwise. This means a stronger commitment to basic rights such as the Right to Health, the Right to Information, the Right to Life and the Right to Dignity, which should not only be exhibited through their Corporate Social Responsibility reports, but through proactive measures towards combating bullying, disinformation, misinformation and hate speech on its platforms. Facebook's Community and Ad policies currently make no mention of commitments to basic human rights.

The study strongly recommend Facebook invest in technologies which are inclusive and recognize the intersectionality of human experience. As an auxiliary finding the study also revealed that leading female Dutch politicians like Sigrid Kaag had only a 1% "*share of the total voice*" on the platform. Facebook determines "[share of total voice](#)" based on the share of

interaction a profile has received in a Crowd Tangle List. The Crowd Tangle List for this study consisted of all the Dutch candidate pages available in public domain on Facebook.

Facebook must pay attention to reports such as this one and address the content that is flagged. If Facebook is genuinely interested in making its “community safe for all”, then content flagged in research made by identifiable civil society actors, academics, and independent non-partisan organizations should be taken seriously.

Facebook must align its policies, including those on transparency and accountability, with the basic tenets of procedural, evidentiary and administrative law, while remaining open to challenges and modifications. This would mean investing in Law and Policy teams whose responsibility is not to defend Facebook in litigation, but rather to create sound and coherent rules.

For the Dutch Government:

Dutch Government must strengthen scientific communication as well as communication around civic responsibility. While the Netherlands has already taken measures by instituting funds and commitments towards both these goals. These are welcome steps. However, the communication must embed an empathetic view of the problematics faced by the Dutch society. The recent Child Benefit Scandal has revealed a certain structural apathy towards the country’s citizens. Dutch government must take action to incorporate sensitizing-training and improving empathy while dealing with public health communications.

The Netherlands proactively adopt a Digital Services Act while the European Union’s proposal for legislation remains in the pipeline. The act would ensure that platforms used by Dutch citizens, irrespective of the geography of the service provider, would have appropriate checks in place to filter out misinformation and disinformation. In effect, platforms would have to build consistent mechanisms for self-regulation of content or face penalties where they failed to set standards in a timely manner or arbitrarily deviated from them. It may also include reliance on the principles of Universal Jurisdiction to protect the fundamental rights of the Dutch citizens across the world, including the right to correct information.

Finally, tackling digital spaces in a future-oriented way means looking beyond national boundaries and notional ideas of company registration. European nations should build on the foundation laid by GDPR, to collectively ensure that digital spaces are inclusive and, regardless of location, conform to universal human rights.

For Civil Society:

Walk out and stage a boycott. We invite organizations who buy Facebook Ads to organize and regularly participate in Facebook Ad Boycott actions.

Overview

Chapter 1, *The Dutch elections*, introduces the non-Dutch readers to the multi-cultural, vibrant political landscape of the Netherlands. The authors make brief remarks on the 2021 election result and introduce readers to the research objectives and methodology.

Chapter 2, *The ad will shock you*, digs deeper into the content of ads purchased by far-right political parties in November 2019. This month was selected as it marked the beginning of the accelerated growth of the far-right parties online. It is highlighted that while all Dutch political parties and candidates continue to spend heavily on Facebook ads, only those parties whose ads are shocking, contains [borderline content](#) or disinformation gather higher reach, engagement and follower growth.

Chapter 3, *STOP DE LOCKDOWN*, highlights how political ads laden with COVID-disinformation were widely shared on Facebook by political parties and enriched Facebook by at least 199,300 Euros between December 2020 to February 2021. The chapter highlight how the COVID-19 disinformation led to a lack of trust in the COVID-19 measures adopted by the Netherlands government. In turn, this led to anti-COVID-19 measure protests across the Netherlands, reluctance towards the use of face-masks in public places, and a hesitancy towards vaccines. For example, a recent report by Avaaz discussed [how Facebook is neglecting Europe's infodemic](#) and study by [Eurofound](#) indicated that **24.9% people in Netherlands are very unlikely to be vaccinated against COVID-19, of these 54.9% of respondents believe that the risk of COVID-19 is**. The study findings from the Netherlands confirms this infodemic.

Chapter 4, *Chasing QAnon down the rabbit hole*, shows that despite Facebook's clear policy against platforming QAnon and QAnon-linked conspiracy theories, there are at least 170 Dutch language pages and groups with a membership of 1.3 million users (and growing) actively spreading disinformation, including on COVID. We also identify intricately connected actor-networks, in which Dutch celebrities with verified Facebook profiles actively spread conspiracy theories.

Chapter 5, *The post does not violate community standards* highlights the result of flagging 938 posts to Facebook between February 2021 and March 2021. Of these posts, 98% remain on Facebook. Several of these posts were fact-checked by Facebook's third-party fact-checking program. Despite Facebook's policy to label COVID-19 disinformation, none of the fact-checked posts reported to Facebook were labelled at the time of reporting. This implies that Facebook's policy on COVID-19 disinformation is far from effective in a non-English-speaking context. Despite its public façade the study finds that Facebook does not follow through with regards to upholding election integrity in non-English speaking countries.

Chapter 6 makes *Recommendations* to Facebook, the Dutch government and civil society based on the findings.

Chapter 1

1. The Dutch elections

On 17 March 2021, the Netherlands returned to “Dutch normal”, with the Dutch people electing Mark Rutte their Prime Minister for the fourth time. Speaking to the press outside Parliament, a jubilant Rutte declared that, “The voters of the Netherlands have given my party an overwhelming vote of confidence.” This victory came in spite of his Cabinet’s resignation in January 2021 following the child benefits scandalⁱ, and chaos in the aftermath of the election results in which political partners were sidelined. To many in the Netherlands, the victory of Rutte’s center-right People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) and its increased share of parliamentary seatsⁱⁱ in the elections reflect the “normal” Dutch reliance on familiarity amid the abnormal pandemic context. The second biggest winner, Sigrid Kaag of centrist Democratic 66 (D66),ⁱⁱⁱ out-performed expectations. As Kaag celebrated her party’s results atop a table, we peered beneath her success to the charred embers left by the wildfire of disinformation and misinformation that had smoldered throughout the Dutch election period.



D66 leader Sigrid Kaag celebrates after her party’s strong showing in the Dutch election. Photograph: Martijn Beekman

The elections were intriguing for several reasons. First, contentious issues from past elections (among them immigration, climate change, “de-Islamisation”, wage-benefits and income security) took a back seat as the handling of the COVID-19 crisis^{iv} emerged as central. Second, COVID-19 was not only the central issue of party campaigns; it also restricted how parties could campaign in the absence of traditional rallies. Most of the parties relied heavily on social media, as well as traditional broadcast media, to put out their messages. Third, and more surprising even than the re-election of Rutte, the results presented several unexpected winners: Sylvana Simone of BIJ1^v rose from the left-wing activist scene of Amsterdam to become the only Black female Member of Parliament of this term. And 1.01% of the Dutch population voted for a female farmer’s leader, Caroline van der Plas of BoerBurgerBeweging (BBB),^{vi} who drove her tractor to the Houses of Parliament. Groen Links (GL) and the

Socialist Party (SP) lost 9 overall seats. New entrants like the Pan-EU party, Volt,^{vii} and Juiste Antwoord 2021 (JA21) sent three candidates each to the Parliament. Geert Wilders' Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)^{viii} lost some share of votes and seats, and the far-right Forum for Democracy (FvD) which was founded in 2016, quadrupled its seats from two to eight by successfully leading a “freedom caravan”^{ix} campaign across the Netherlands in the run-up to the elections.

In this study we investigate the spread of disinformation, misinformation and hate-speech before and during the Dutch election campaigns. We use the period between 17th March 2020 and 17th March 2021 to study the growth of COVID-19 disinformation in Netherlands-based Dutch-language pages and groups. We use the period between 17th March 2019 to 17th March 2021 to understand the economy of political campaigns on Facebook. And we use 17th December 2020 and 17th March 2021 to highlight how Facebook's business model allows political parties to push COVID-19 disinformation campaigns. We conclude that Dutch Facebook is infested with unchecked disinformation, with as many as 1.3 million Dutch users on Facebook exposed to disinformation during and after the election campaign period. Countering disinformation in a country as small as the Netherlands, where only 10.2 million^x people are Facebook users, is not one of Facebook's priorities. The result is a major infodemic in which Dutch QAnon networks are thriving.

We did not find any direct or covert involvement by foreign governments. However, **we are deeply concerned by the silent influence social media has on political campaigns.** We show how politically motivated social media campaigns that originated in the United States of America influenced the social and political behavior of people in the Netherlands. We define this person-to-person transmission of misinformation narratives and content between countries as a ‘silent influence’^{xi} of social media. This silent influence has led to the creation of alternative realities, polarization and protests in Dutch streets, as well as spurring litigation questioning the election's validity on the basis of alleged vote-counting fraud. While votes to right-wing parties increased by only 3% in this election, in practice this meant that the far-right party, through the use of shocking and disinformation-laden ads, quadrupled its seats in parliament – from two in 2017 to eight in 2021. Our study finds that the conspiracy theories on Facebook were promoted through a wide network of dispersed actors, several of whom genuinely believe the misinformation that is amplified on their social media feeds. While the government and its agencies have failed to communicate their pandemic plans with the required level of urgency, sensitivity and coverage, disinformation circulated by populist political leaders has flourished. Social media platforms (and especially Facebook) have fed the fire. In the gaps between proper, up-to-date information, Facebook's inadequate moderation policies have amplified, and generated revenue from, disinformation.

In fact, despite Facebook's advertisement policy and community standards pledging to prohibit COVID-19 misinformation, Facebook has earned close to 199,300 Euros in advertising revenue from COVID disinformation in the last 90 days prior to the elections alone. We contend that the conspiracy groups, pages and misleading political messaging has ignited a **digital wildfire of disinformation**, in which certain populist actors have stoked the flames through their ad spend. Importantly, **this digital wildfire must be actively countered**

through counter speech measures and proactive platform moderation undertaken by Facebook, as well as regulation to create stricter platform responsibility, combined with proper science communication and civic education.

The Netherlands is a country with a sophisticated and functional democratic system, which holds individual freedoms such as free speech and privacy in high regard. It is also one of the few countries which is a signatory to the Net Neutrality agreement^{xiii}. Yet, as the wildfire of disinformation spreads across and beyond Facebook, social cohesion has started to fray. The failures of Facebook that are highlighted in this report must be taken extremely seriously. **Facebook has maintained that it is a community. We contend that if this is the case, it is patriarchal, exclusionary, and saturated with gossip and populist beliefs.** This alleged “community” is dependent on an unevolved artificial intelligence, which assists in burning people of science and decreeing their work “black magic”. We also contend that Facebook is wrong to assert that their online community is representative of human society, as they have done numerous times, including in meetings with us. Instead Facebook’s Corporate Human Rights Policy^{xiii} launched on 16th March 2021 is a watered-down approach to core Human Rights obligations^{xiv} and Facebook’s platforms fail to reflect our collective global humanity and common future^{xv} in its community values. Facebook’s willingness to allow algorithms to amplify populist leaders all over the world not only undermines democratic discourse but even threatens lives. As a multinational corporation, Facebook must take responsibility to ensure that its platforms channel life-saving information instead of spreading life-threatening noise, be that regarding health, society or otherwise. We therefore insist that Facebook abide by its corporate commitments to human rights and embed its model in universal human rights standards rather than relying on “ethical AI”.^{xvi}

Methodology

In the run-up to the 2021 elections, we manually compiled the social media handles of the 825 candidates standing from across 28 parties. We narrowed this list down to the 18 parties with the most considerable presence on social media and grouped the candidates from these parties based on their party’s ideology. Our categorization of parties along the ideological spectrum from far-right to left-wing is based on a broad analysis of party agendas. For example, we classified VSN as centrist due to their general election agenda, even though the political campaigns of both FvD and VSN were based on questioning COVID-19 measures. Similarly, while some commentators consider BIJ1 to be a far- left party, we placed them in the leftwing group based on the proximity of their agenda to other leftwing parties.

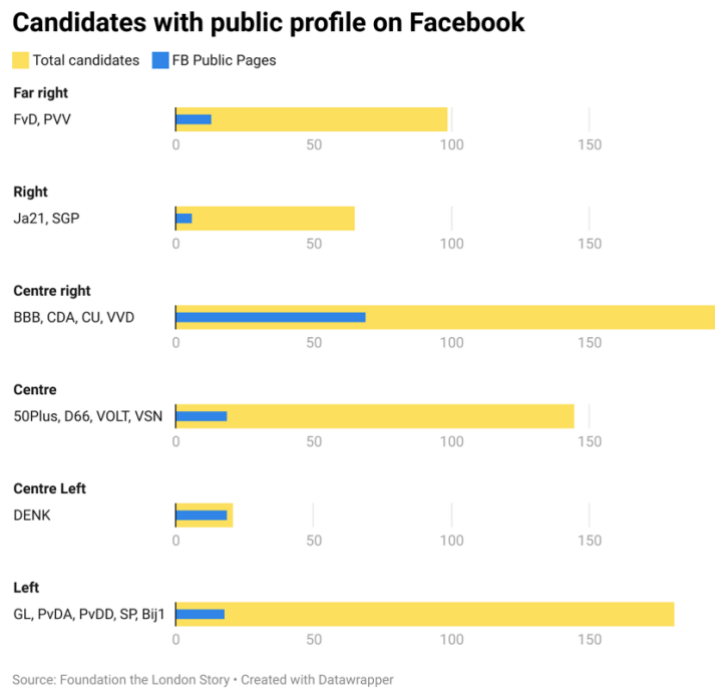


Figure 1 - Dutch political candidates on Facebook

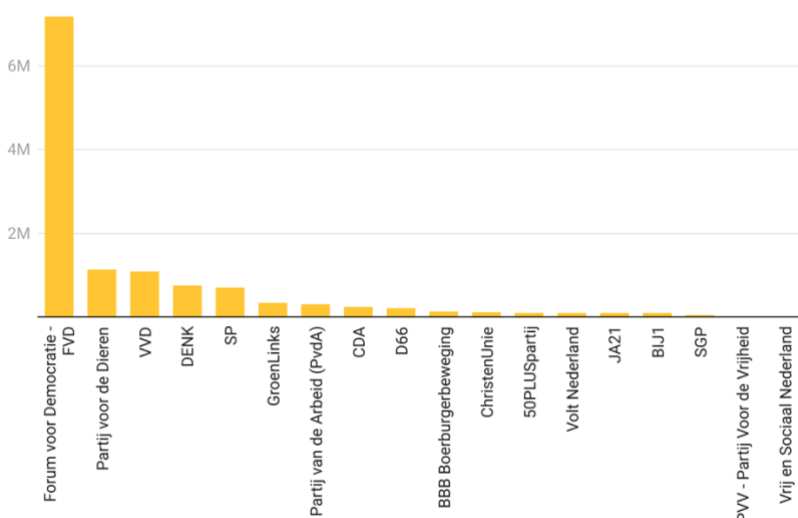
With this preliminary selection, we limited ourselves to 710 candidates, of whom only 127 had a public page. Our aggregated analysis of candidates on Facebook is thus limited to 127 public candidate pages and 18 party pages.

Using digital ethnographic methods, we strategically inserted ourselves in conspiracy groups and pages that actively spread COVID-19 misinformation. We found these groups using the reverse-methodology applied by Avaaz in its disinformation analysis, whereby keywords and headlines from debunked and fact-checked information are used to identify groups and networks sharing content on Facebook. In total, we identified 226 groups and pages, of which 170 are public and rest are either private groups or private profiles. We joined 23 of these private groups to better understand the disinformation landscape. We discovered overwhelming support for the far-right party FvD and PVV in these groups. **This overwhelming support towards far-right was one of the key factors determining our inclination to analyze the political messaging of far-right through organic and paid content.**

We realized that while PVV's party page had a very limited interaction and ad spent, the Ad spent of Fvd was above 600,000 euros on Facebook, making it one of the largest Political ad buyers. This helped us narrow down our analysis in this particular study to FvD. This is not to say that we will not analyze the Ad content and messaging of other parties at a later time. Other interesting factors which led to the decision to analyze the ad spent and party messaging of FvD were that at the time of the election campaign FvD was a relatively new party with a massive political ad spent, only two seats in the parliament, and several political controversies, including party break-ups. FvD 's party page had enormous total interactions on Facebook which surpassed all other party pages (Figure 2).

Interaction on Facebook party pages

Total interaction from 17 Mar 2019 to 17 Mar 2021



Source: Ritumbra Manuvie via Crowd Tangle List 1520267 • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 2 - Total interaction generated by the party pages on Facebook

Finally, from 1 February 2021 onwards we used a reverse information search to identify pages and groups in which information already debunked by Facebook's third-party independent fact-checkers was still being posted. We dedicatedly flagged 938 posts to Facebook based on their flagging criteria over a course of 7 weeks. We focused primarily on COVID-19 disinformation, climate disinformation and hate speech. The cumulative result of this process of using the platform's own flagging tools is discussed in Chapter 5 of this report. At the time of writing of this report and throughout the process of review and editing, we have also flagged and re-flagged the posts which are used in this study, however, those are not necessarily included in the set of 938 posts reported, which remains to be a unique data-set.

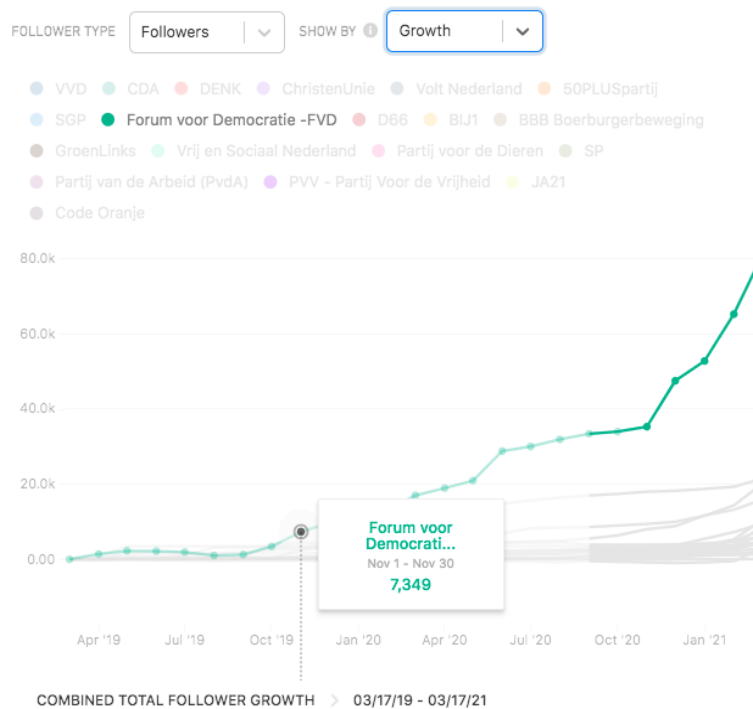
Chapter 2

2. The ad will shock you!

In 2018, Mark Zuckerberg admitted that the more borderline the content, the more likely it is to receive engagement.^{xvii} To counter this, he outlined how borderline content would be disincentivized by actively reducing user engagement by using “AI systems” to “detect borderline content”. Our findings confirm that Facebook algorithms continue to encourage higher interaction with shocking and sensationalist content, and that Facebook also continues to generate revenue off this content by allowing it in political ads. Facebook's ad policy ostensibly prohibits running ads which are sensationalist in nature. Ad policy Section 4, clause 11^{xviii} clearly says “Ads must not contain shocking, sensational, inflammatory or excessively violent content.” Facebook’s first example of ‘sensational ads’ is of “*Ads claiming that a person or group of people are a threat to the physical safety, health or survival of others based on race, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, caste, sex, gender, gender identity, serious disease, disability or immigration status*”.

By way of several examples Facebook has provided a broad categorization of what is ‘sensational content’ which include violent or de-humanizing speech to content depicting pimple popping. On one hand Facebook’s broad categorization misses the mark of definition the process also suffers from lack of proper reporting channels where one can flag ‘sensational’ or ‘inflammatory’ Ads. This lack of definition and content support is further exuberated by the ambiguity on Facebook’s moderation process. Facebook’s response to flagged post remains to be a black box, which we discuss more in detail in Chapter 5 where we share the result of 938 posts flagged to Facebook by our research team.

In this Chapter we focus first on the ads of FvD, particularly from the month of November 2019. The reason for selecting this month is because using Crowd Tangle, we found, that FvD’s followership on Facebook started to grow disproportionately in comparison with other parties during November 2019 (Figure 3 below).



Source: Ritumbra Manuvie via Crowd Tangle

Figure 3 -FvD followership growth on Facebook during November 2019

Using Facebook’s Ad Library, we found that despite Facebook’s rules against “sensational” and “shocking” ads, FvD’s ads would be classified as shocking and sensational. For example, FvD ad with ID no. 786818241772763^{xix} shows women in burqas speaking agitatedly in Arabic with subtitles in Dutch. The statements by the women include references to the desire for the creation of an Islamic state. The video was recorded in Al-Hawl refugee camp, Syria. The explanation on the ad reads:

Deze #terroristes wil ons losgeslagen OM terughalen. Ons land loopt gevaar met deze fanatiekelingen en hun kroost in ons midden, en bovendien is het een schoffering van de slachtoffers van IS. We moeten en kunnen de controle over onze landsgrenzen terugkrijgen, dat betekent minder Europa en een sterkere minister van Justitie! <https://fvd.nl/ja>

Our Public Prosecutor Office wants to bring these #terrorists back. Our country is in danger with these fanatics and their offspring in our midst, and moreover, it is an insult to the victims of IS. We can and must regain control of our borders, that means less Europe and a stronger Minister of Justice! <https://fvd.nl/ja> [Translation by Foundation The London Story for meaning]

The video is part of various videos shot on ISIS brides by several media houses during the Syria crisis at its peak. The video here makes a broad generalization based on identity. Despite Facebook’s policy to prohibit ads which create identity-based generalizations, or frame a group of people as a threat to the safety and survival of others, this ad continues to be on Facebook and has been viewed over 452.8K times. Our attempts to report this ad as hate-speech and false information were rejected by Facebook’s moderation process.

Forum voor Democratie -FVD posted a video.
1 year ago · 288,815 Followers · 34 seconds

Deze #terroristes wil ons losgeslagen OM terughalen

Deze #terroristes wil ons losgeslagen OM terughalen. Ons land loopt gevaar met deze fanatiekelingen en hun kroost in ons midden, en bovendien is het een schotting van de slachtoffers van IS. We moeten en kunnen de controle over onze landsgrenzen terugkrijgen, dat betekent minder Europa en een sterkere minister van Justitie! <https://fvd.nl/ja>



329.6K Post Views 452.8K Total Views

Why did this match the search?
👤 5,669 🗨️ 4,521 🔄 2,836

About the ad

Forum voor Democratie -FVD
Sponsored · Paid for by Forum voor Democratie -FVD
ID: 786818241772763

Deze #terroristes wil ons losgeslagen OM terughalen. Ons land loopt gevaar met deze fanatiekelingen en hun kroost in ons midden, en bovendien is het een schotting van de slachtoffers van IS. We moeten en kunnen de controle over onze landsgrenzen terugkrijgen, dat betekent minder Europa en een sterkere minister van Justitie! <https://fvd.nl/ja>



Deze #terroristes wil ons losgeslagen OM terughalen

About the disclaimer

When an advertiser categorises their ad as being about social issues, elections or politics, they are required to disclose who paid for the ad. [Learn more](#)

Info needed - Today at 17:45 Thanks for your feedback

Thanks for your report – you did the right thing by letting us know about this. The post was reviewed, and although it doesn't go against one of our specific **Community Standards**, we understand that it may still be offensive to you and others. No one should have to see posts they consider hateful on Facebook, so we want to help you avoid things like this in the future.

From the list above, you can block Forum voor Democratie -FVD directly, or you may be able to unfriend or unfollow them. If you unfollow them, you'll remain friends on Facebook, but you won't see their posts in your News Feed.

We know these options may not apply to every situation, so please let us know if you see something else you think we should review. You may also consider using Facebook to speak out and educate the community around you. Counter-speech in the form of accurate information and alternative viewpoints can help create a safer and more respectful environment.

Today at 16:43 Your Report

Thanks for letting us know about something you don't want to see on Facebook. You'll receive an update here in your Support Inbox when your report has been reviewed.

[See Options](#)

Data behind the ad

Inactive
8 Nov 2019 · 11 Nov 2019
ID: 786818241772763

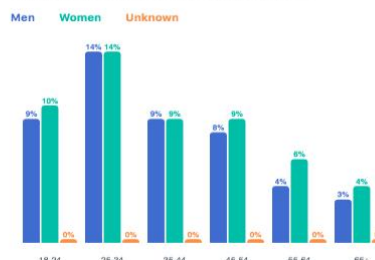
Impressions
The number of times that an ad was on a screen. May include multiple views by the same people. [Learn more](#)

Impressions
500K-600K

Amount spent
The estimated total amount of money spent on an ad during its schedule. [Learn more](#)

Amount spent
€2K-€2.5K (EUR)

Who was shown this ad
The age and gender breakdowns of people who saw this ad.

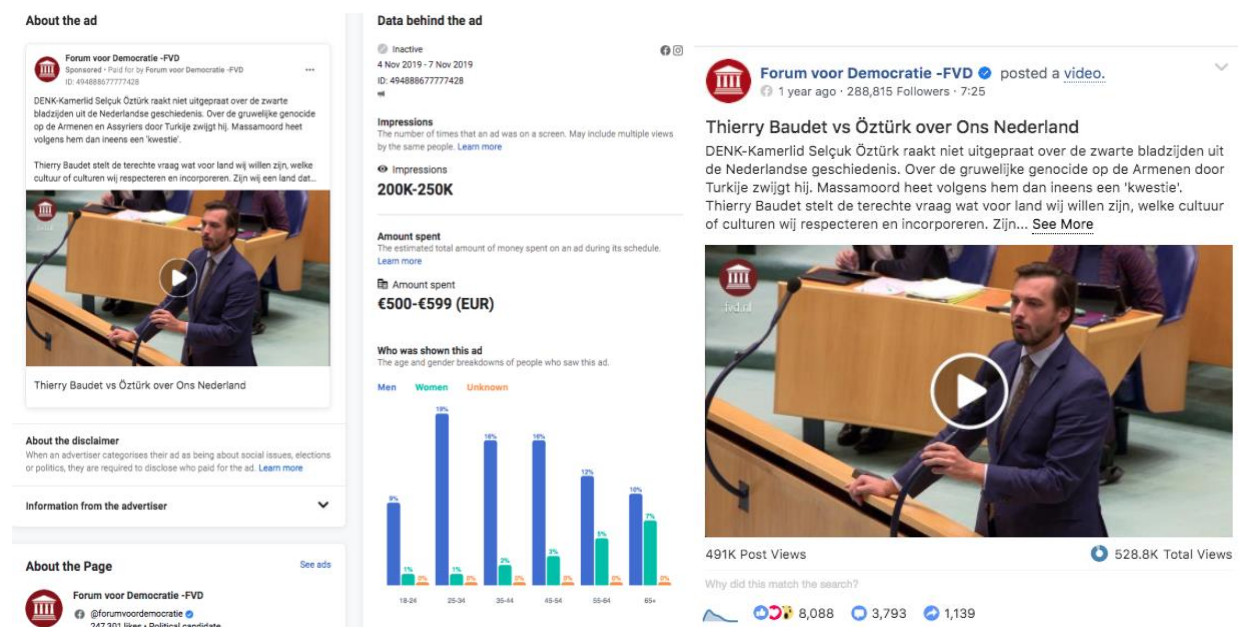


FvD ads also used short, sensationalized excerpts from open public debates to create identity-based generalizations. For example, ad with ID no. 494888677777428^{xx} is a clipping from the debate in the Tweede Kamer (lower house of the Dutch Parliament), in which FvD's co-founder and leader Thierry Baudet pitches himself against center-Left party DENK's leader Selçuk Öztürk. The ad reads:

DENK Kamerlid Selçuk Öztürk raakt niet uitgepraat over de zwarte bladzijden uit de Nederlandse geschiedenis. Over de gruwelijke genocide op de Armenen en Assyriërs door Turkije zwijgt hij. Massamoord heet volgens hem dan ineens een 'kwestie'. Thierry Baudet stelt de terechte vraag wat voor land wij willen zijn, welke cultuur of culturen wij respecteren en incorporeren. Zijn wij een...'

DENK Member of Parliament Selçuk Öztürk cannot stop talking about the black pages of Dutch history. He is silent about the gruesome genocide of the Armenians and Assyrians by Turkey. According to him, mass murder suddenly becomes an 'issue'. Thierry Baudet asks the correct question of what kind of country we want to be, which culture or cultures we respect and incorporate. Are we one... [Translation by Foundation The London Story for meaning]

In the video itself, Thierry Baudet questions whether Turkish and Moroccan individuals “belong” in the Netherlands. Selçuk Öztürk asserts that the Netherlands is a secular country, highlights that he himself is a Dutch citizen, and challenges whether Baudet has a unique right to define whose country the Netherlands is. Baudet replies (translated by us from Dutch), “Our history dictates who we are as a nation and if we want to share our country.” The ad, both the video and the accompanying caption, has a divisive agenda and goes against the Dutch spirit of secularism. For this ad, Facebook earned between 500 to 599 Euros. It received 200,000-250,000 impressions and was seen disproportionately by young men (Impression is the number of times that an ad was on a screen. May include multiple views by the same people). Despite containing borderline and sensationalist content, the video in the ad was viewed 528.8K times.

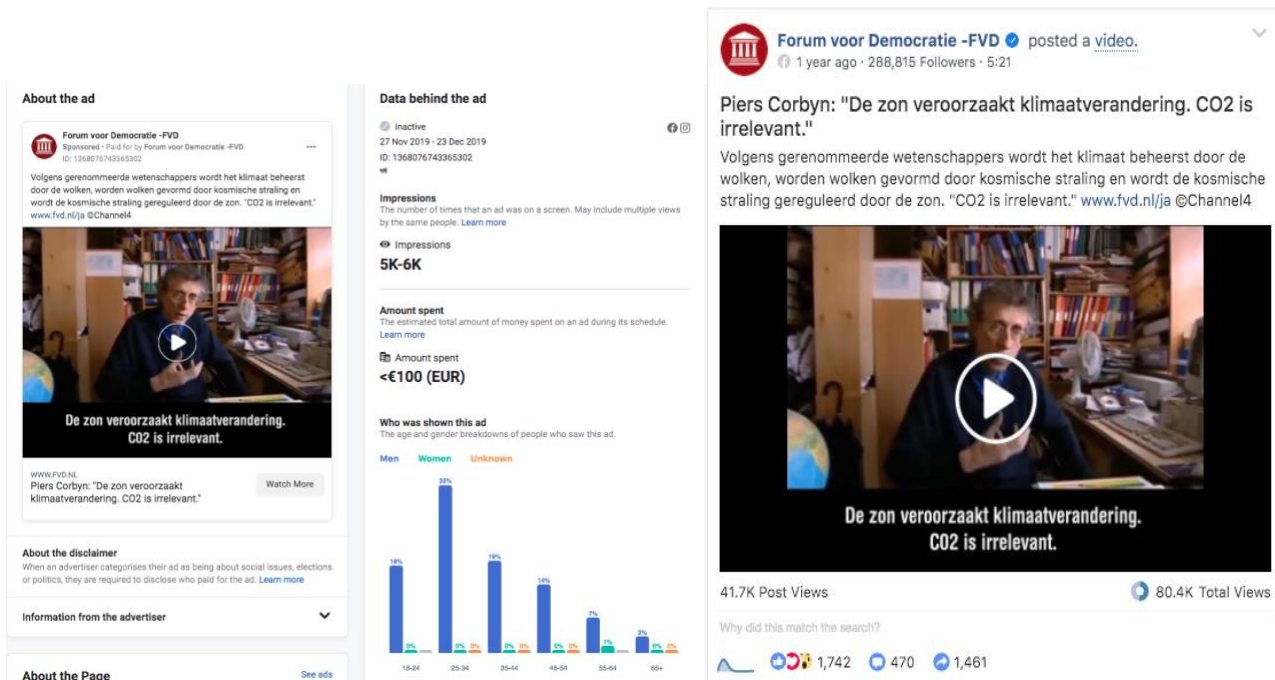


Ad with ID 1368076743365302^{xxi} provides a glimpse into Facebook’s inaction on climate-disinformation. Although this ad, which was paid for by FvD, was published before Facebook’s declaration on stepping up for climate change^{xxii}, our reporting of the ad as false information as recently as May 2021 resulted in no action. The ad is a video of Piers Corbyn, the older brother of the former British Labour party leader Jeremy Corbyn and a campaigner ‘against 5G’ in the UK, asserting that climate change is a natural phenomenon. The ad reads:

Volgens gerenommeerde wetenschappers wordt het klimaat beheerst door de wolken, worden wolken gevormd door kosmische straling en wordt de kosmische straling gereguleerd door de zon. "CO2 is irrelevant." www.fvd.nl/ja ©Channel4

According to renowned scientists, the climate is controlled by clouds, clouds are formed by cosmic rays and cosmic rays are regulated by the sun. "CO2 is irrelevant." www.fvd.nl/ja ©Channel4 [Translation by Foundation The London Story for meaning]

According to the Facebook Ad Library, the ad was seen mostly by young men, and according to CrowdTangle was viewed over 80K times.



It is worth noting that FvD receives funding from Stichting Milieu, Wetenschap & Beleid (SMWB)^{xxiii}, a climate-skeptic foundation which has also funded Clintel^{xxiv} and Cafe Weltschmerz^{xxv}. SMBW and Clintel maintain the *Climategate.nl*^{xxvi} page on Facebook, which broadcasts climate disinformation and skepticism through its posts. Clintel's Berri Pelsers^{xxvii} has paid to run climate-skeptic ads and misinformation^{xxviii} on Facebook for Climategate.nl. Pelsers also has links to Ross McKittrick^{xxix} who is identified by DeSmog, a reliable global warming fact-checking website, as a climate denier^{xxx}. While FvD may not be directly linked to many of these actors, FvD founder Thierry Baudet's climate denialism^{xxxi} is well-known and has been documented by researchers at Maastricht University.

Facebook's lack of clear policy on climate change skepticism and denialism gives political parties, and climate skeptics in non-English speaking countries the ability to boost their messages by paying for ads, thereby capturing the landscape of social narratives. This could severely and negatively affect the UN Climate Change Conference COP26, which is being held in Glasgow in November this year. While political parties may have differing views on issues like climate policy, the timing of skeptic advertisements, reach, agenda, and the agents behind the advertisement should all be considered in a systemic approach to understanding how narratives are used to derail climate negotiations.

While Facebook prohibits "sensational" content under Ad Policy Section 4 clause 11^{xxxii}, it does not define its precise meaning. Therefore, we use the term "sensational" to refer to content which uses disinformation or other methods to provoke emotional reactions^{xxxiii}. We




base our assessment of whether a claim is a disinformation on EU Institutions jointly adopted Action Plan Against Disinformation which defines ‘Disinformation’ as:

“Verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public harm; including threats to democratic processes as well as to public goods such as health, environment or security.”

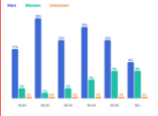



We further classified them as ‘sensationalism’ when ad content related to immigration, xenophobia or climate denial, as themes in politics which invoke emotional reactions. Of the 17 ads published by FvD during November 2019 (14 of which had unique content), we classified 10 as “sensationalizing” borderline content(8 of those 10 had unique content).

In the table below, we have listed all the unique ads from November 2019 posted by FvD on Facebook. **We have color-coded the eight unique problematic ads in red.** As these ads were in Dutch, we have used Facebook’s own internal translation mechanism to reproduce the content of the ad. The ad labels were reviewed three times, first by two native Dutch-speaking researchers, second by a partially Dutch-speaking researcher, and finally by the research lead. The Ads are hyperlinked to their IDs.

Table 1 – All unique ads posted on Facebook by FvD from November 2019

Ad Id (URL)/ label	Ad text, English translation	Spent	Impressions
2566459863416373 Poster ad SENSATIONALIST Populist- anti-immigrant, climate skeptic, border-securitization	The European Commission wants the Netherlands to pay 75% more EU contribution per year: 13 billion per year. What do we get in return for this? Open borders and uncontrolled immigration, climate policies that cost us billions, fake news police, stifling regulations for farmers and entrepreneurs. FVD wants this to stop. Under no circumstances should even more tax money go to the EU. https://fvd.nl/ja	€100	~1K  Seen by older people, especially men
575179609720726 Video of Theo Hiddema – an FvD politician in parliament	ISIS fighters are never allowed to return to the Netherlands. Women, who have volunteered to join the most murderous terror organization the world has seen in decades, are also not welcome here. They have turned their backs on our hospitality to create a sadistic universe in a desert far away. https://fvd.nl/ja	€1.5K-2K	500-600K  Seen by mostly men
437961916855981 Poster ad. Party conference invitation	Saturday, November 30, 2019, is the day! Then the fourth FVD party conference will take place in the Midden Nederland Hallen in Barneveld. The formal General Members' Meeting will take place in the morning, followed by an extensive afternoon program.	<€100	15K-20K  Seen mostly by men aged 18-54 years

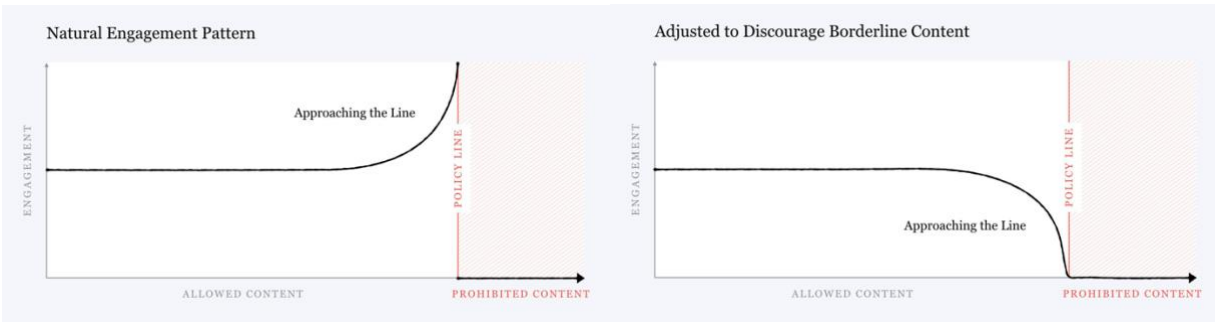
789215188243714 Video message Climate skepticism	<p>In Brussels, too, everything revolves around priceless climate policy. The European Commission's climate plan will cost 11500 BILLION Euros over the next twenty years. FVD MEP @djeppink asked in the European Parliament: who is going to pay for that? A deadly silence followed because the answer is “the citizen”. It is that simple. FVD.nl/ja</p>	€200-299	50K-60K  Seen by people aged 45+, mostly men
811550539283781 Video debate from Parliament anti-Moroccan	<p>Theo Hiddema brought to light last night that VVD State Secretary Broekers Knol had himself been expelled by Morocco. Morocco has been sending us their people, often not the best, for years, letting them abuse our benefits. We are being fooled and this cabinet is not doing anything at all. They do not even force a conversation! FVD wants to take decisive action: if Morocco does not cooperate, we will have to take tougher measures. https://fvd.nl/ja</p>	€500-599	80K-90K  Targeted at people aged 45+, mostly men
1351353778379194 Image. Party messaging on speed limit	<p>They have really gone crazy. Despite all the election promises, despite all the fine words: all motorways in the Netherlands are now going to 100 kilometers per hour. VVD and CDA have completely surrendered to the climate madness of Groen Links. FVD wants common sense to return to politics. Join! https://fvd.nl/ja</p>	€4-4.5K	800K-900K  Mostly seen by men
488341195100017 Party action on policy with respect to Friesland	<p>Success for FVD in Friesland: our proposal not to expand the number of Natura 2000 areas even further was successful! Now we have to give space to farmers and construction companies. Of course, Groen Links and D66 voted against our motion, but luckily, we got a majority. With FVD, the Netherlands can finally move forward again! fvd.nl/ja.</p>	€100	5K-6K  Mostly seen by women
582091965891427 Image of Theo Hiddema	<p>Forum for Democracy is fast becoming the largest party in the Netherlands. We need your help to change existing politics, end climate madness and stop mass immigration. We stand for the backbone of this country and fight for the interests of the middle class. Become a member, participate and make FVD the largest member party!</p>	€1-1.5K	100K-125K  Mostly seen by men
467330674140143 Video. Party message of growth (MESSAGING with video)	<p>Forum for Democracy is fast becoming the largest party in the Netherlands. We need your help to change existing politics, end climate madness and stop mass immigration. We stand for the backbone of this country and fight for the interests of the middle class. Become a member, participate and make FVD the largest member party!</p>	€1.5-2K	500K-600K  Seen mostly by young men
460957447883296 Video message Climate denial	<p>Nature in the Netherlands is doing better than ever. The nitrogen crisis is therefore not a nature or environmental problem. It is an accounting crisis! It is about rules about permits, not about a problem with our nature! We must stop the madness and introduce the German nitrogen regulations - that is just possible - so that the whole of the Netherlands can move forward again.</p>	€3-3.5K	700K-800K  Seen mostly by men

729401247560810 Video of Rutte	More EU, more immigration, more rules, more taxes: that is the result of years of Rutte policy. It is time to switch to FVD! FVD.nl/overstappen	€700-799	100K-125K  Seen mostly by men
873219209741142 Video of Baudet in Parliament Anti-migrant	Politicians of established parties prefer not to talk about it, but in the Netherlands immigrants """"young people"""" often attack native Dutch young people. The disgusting images from Gorinchem speak for themselves. FVD requested a debate about this because this has to stop! The House of Representatives hides behind the vague term """"young people """"and votes against a debate on this important topic. Unsustainable. FVD.nl/ja	€1.5K-2K	400K-450K  Seen mostly by men
2526784940931924 Video message of Baudet in Parliament. Question on war in Iraq	At the beginning of June 2015, the dozens of innocent civilian deaths in Iraq as a result of Dutch bombings were already known to the Minister of Defense. Most likely, Rutte was also fully informed. The information was withheld. Civilian casualties were even denied in a letter to the House of 23 June 2015. Subsequently, a decision was taken on 30 June to extend this mission. WITHOUT Parliament and society therefore knowing the facts. The cabinet LIES! fvd.nl/ja.	€100	3K-4K  shown only in North Holland
446522172676019 Video message from Parliament. Anti-Ukraine	The Association Agreement with Ukraine is a disaster. According to Rutte, Ukraine would not flood our market with cheap chicken meat. The opposite is true. The Ukrainians found a loophole in the treaty and massively exported cheap meat. Permission from Ukraine is required to amend the treaty. That country is now demanding 50,000 tons of extra chicken duty-free export to the EU. A slap in the face of Dutch poultry farmers and another lie from Rutte. FVD.nl/ja	€100	3K-4K  Ad was seen only in North Holland & disproportionately by men.

Facebook's advertising approval process explicitly allowed these advertisements to go public and the platform generated revenue off the polarizing content.

We took a broad overview of the Facebook ads of other key parties during the month of November and found that D66 ran 3 advertisements^{xxxiv} on sustainable clothing, digital revolution and pro-choice. VVD ran 87 ads^{xxxv}, most of which were memes, ads making fun of Mark Rutte, celebratory posts, and ads asking people to follow VVD on Instagram. Among other far-right parties, PVV ran no ads, and SGP ran 3 ads^{xxxvi} (two unique ads), with one calling against abortions (in a non-sensationalist manner) and the other celebrating SGP as the oldest Dutch party. GroenLinks ran 21 ads^{xxxvii}, (eight unique ads), five of which advertised job vacancies, and the other 16 of which advertised building better societies.

Mark Zuckerberg's 2018 note on Content Governance and Enforcement^{xxxviii} acknowledged that Facebook's algorithm prefers shocking and sensationalist content. Zuckerberg produced the following graphics, reproduced below, and promised content adjustment and a commitment to fighting disinformation.



We contend that Facebook's preference for shocking and sensationalist content remains in place to date. We recognize that Facebook has often taken the position that it is not the arbiter of truth^{xxxix}. In his 2018 Preparing for Elections^{xl} note, Zuckerberg wrote:

*When deciding on this policy, we also discussed whether it would be better to ban political ads altogether. Initially, this seemed simple and attractive. **But we decided against it -- not due to money, as this new verification process is costly and so we no longer make any meaningful profit on political ads** -- but because we believe in giving people a voice. We did not want to take away an important tool many groups use to engage in the political process.* [Emphasis by the writers of this report]

In 2019, Zuckerberg delivered a speech at Georgetown University^{xli}, in which he said: “From a business perspective the controversy [over political ads] is not worth the very small part of the business that they make up.” As we show below, Facebook’s public stand^{xlii} on not moderating and removing political ads which violate its own Ad Policy or are borderline content is highly problematic.

The effects of Facebook’s ads^{xliii} initially came to prominence over alleged US election interference^{xliv} by the political consultancy Cambridge Analytica, which used Facebook user data to target voters. The resulting US Congressional hearings led to Facebook being issued fines^{xlv} of US\$5bn over acute concerns. Nonetheless, in the face of our reports of political ads with shocking and sensationalist content, Facebook appeared unconcerned how its policies, slow moderation, and lack of coherence in tackling misinformation, disinformation and hate speech affect the Netherlands. **It is worth noting that although Mark Zuckerberg has said that Facebook does not make "any meaningful profits" from political ads, in the Netherlands, a small country with a population of 17 million, political parties spent close to 3.3 million Euros on Facebook ads between 17th March 2019 to 17th March 2021 alone.**^{xlvi} This figure only includes the money spent by the primary party page and does not include the amount of ad money spent by individual candidates.^{xlvii} CDA and FvD were the top spenders, with close to 1.2 million Euros in combined spending. In absolute terms, **Facebook’s total ad revenue in the Netherlands was 15 million Euros, of which political ads make up 25%.**^{xlviii}

Ad Spent on Facebook as on 17.05.2021

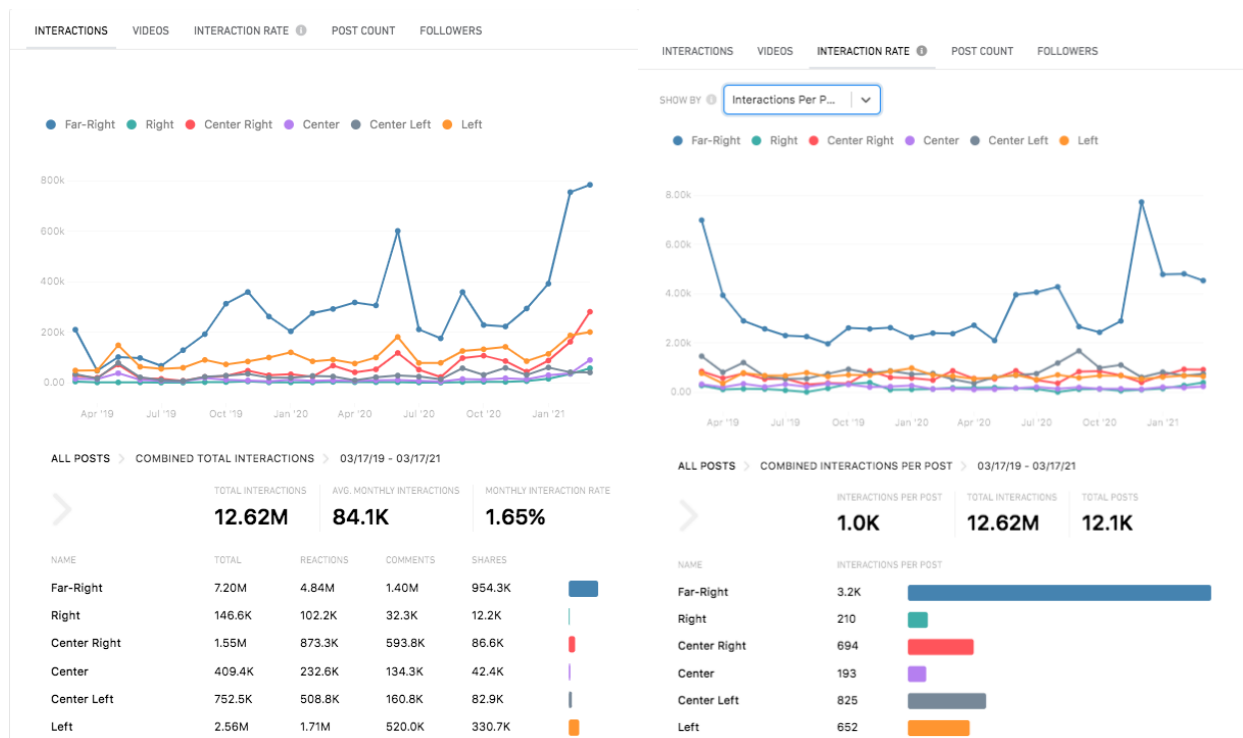
Ad Spent Spent without disclaimer

	Ad Spent	Spent without disclaimer
CDA	698,442	15,043
Fvd	685,247	7,037
VVD	458,863	13,218
D66	454,013	6,045
SP	251,722	4,842
PvDA	214,993	9,631
GL	195,841	5,184
Volt	101,558	2,461
PvDd	100,569	1,902
JA21	66,374	0
CU	40,675	4,867
Bij1	40,642	700
DENK	37,289	1,328
50Plus	27,662	3,799
BBB	25,428	0
Code Oranje	17,284	300
SGP	13,668	1,502
Nida	7,225	742
NLBeter	5,043	0
IJst30	2,600	300
Splinter	2,427	200
Piratenpartij	1,958	0
PVV	1,578	1,200
VSN	1,069	100

Source: M van Dorssen via Facebook Ad Library • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 4 – Facebook ad spend by political party, 15th April 2019 - 17th May 2021

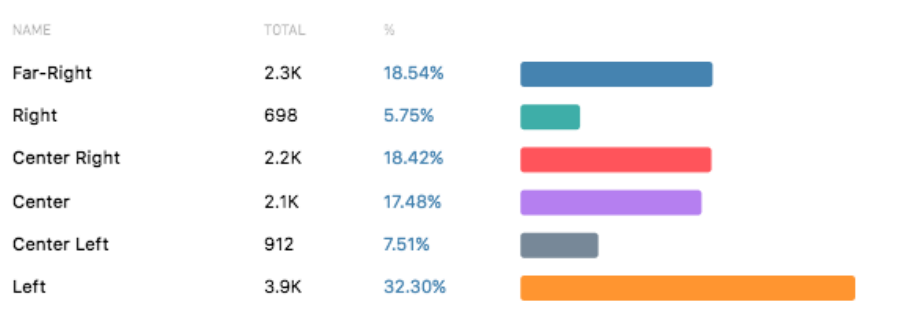
Spending on advertising did not help all parties equally, as right-wing party handles (FvD, SGP, Ja21 and PVV) grew more than the Green parties (SP, GL, BBB and BIJ1) or the traditional center and center-right parties. Using CrowdTangle, we grouped the parties based on their ideologies and measured their level of interaction, posts, followers and other metrics. Our lists consisted of verified page profiles of parties, except for PVV which does not have a verified Facebook page and was grouped with FvD in the far-right segment.



Source: Ritumbra Manuvie via Crowd Tangle

Figure 5 – Absolute interaction online with far-right parties (left) and interaction per post (right)

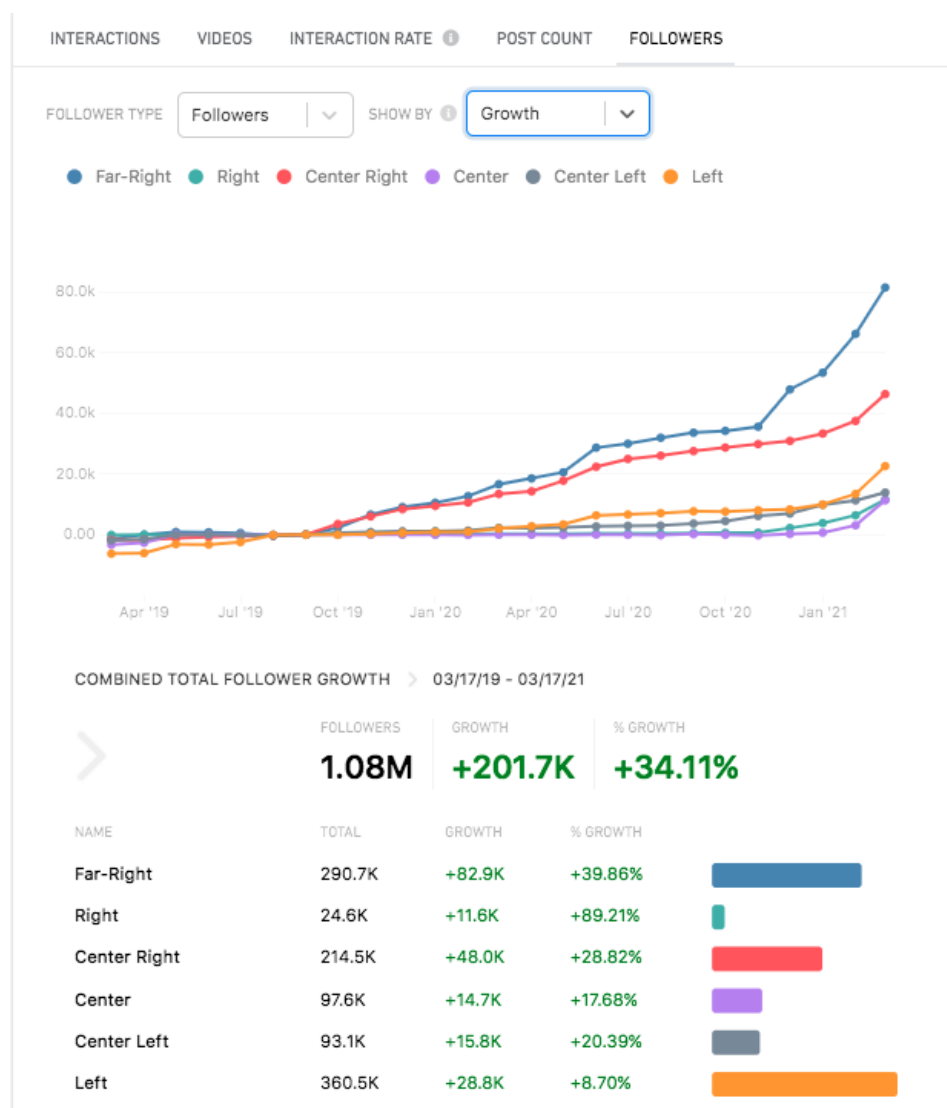
Facebook has argued that interactions alone are not a valid measure of handle comparison, as the rate of interactions as well as total interactions can vary by the number of posts or the number of follower. Nonetheless, we found using Crowd Tangle intelligence that the number of posts shared by Dutch parties were not representative of the interactions per post received by these parties. For example Left parties total posts far exceed the far-right yet it received less interaction than far-right and while posting behavior of far-right, center-right and center parties were similar the far-right parties received greater attention (See Figure 6).



Source: Ritumbra Manuvie via Crowd Tangle

Figure 6 - Number of posts shared by Dutch parties

The rate of follower growth was also seen to be higher in the case of Dutch far-right parties (see Figure 7) .



Source: Ritumbra Manuvie via Crowd Tangle

Figure 7 – Number of followers (left) and rate of follower growth (right) of Dutch far-right parties

This rate of follower growth is not because of the absolute popularity of the far-right in the Netherlands, but rather because of the sensationalist content of both organic posts (which fall under Facebook’s Community Policy) and paid ads (which must follow both Facebook’s Community Policy and Ad Policy).

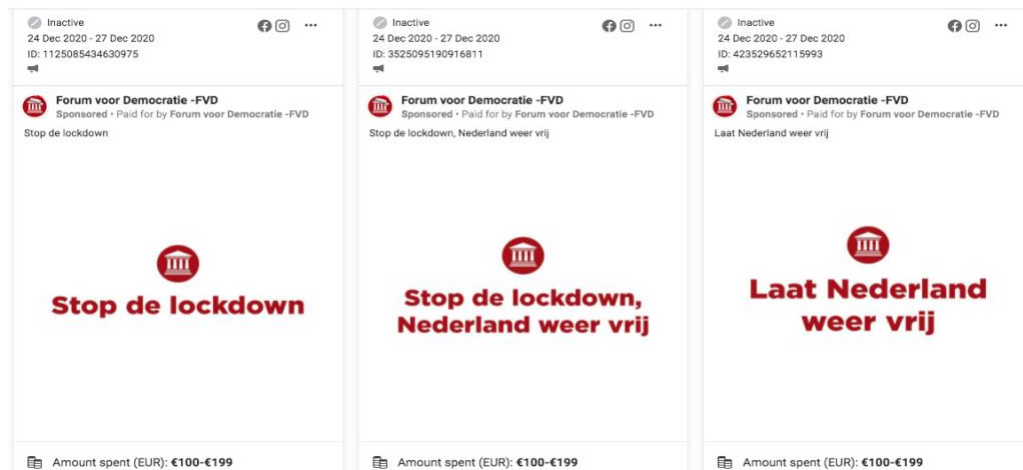
We reiterate that this trend was also visible in the compilation of lists containing candidate across ideological lines. Dutch far-right parties received high engagement, voice share, and followership despite their small presence on Facebook. Our list of Dutch center-right consisted of 69 Facebook public profiles with 32 verified profiles from parties such as CDA, CU and VVD, while the Dutch far-right list only had 13 handles with only 3 verified handles of Geert Wilders and Thierry Baudet. Classified by ideology, the distribution of social media profiles on Facebook is visualized below:

Figure 7 – Distribution of social media profiles according to political view

Facebook ignoring sensationalist content not only violates its own platform policies, but also gives a bigger voice share to far-right parties. This was visible across political ads bought during the election campaign as well as in organically grown content.

In Chapter 3, we discuss political messaging and political advertisement particularly regarding COVID-19 measures. We show that the FvD's ads especially oscillated between community policy violations, ad policy violations and borderline content.

Notably, Dutch newspapers reported that sections of Dutch society consciously do not follow COVID-19 measures and are increasingly skeptical of COVID-19 distancing rules. In fact, the Netherlands has seen regular anti-COVID-19 measure protests^{xlix}, rioting^l, and litigation^{li} – not only against measures but in a severe downplaying of the severity of COVID-19, against the validity of classifying COVID-19 as a “pandemic”. We reiterate that the Netherlands is a country^{lii} with a solid public education system, which ranks number 8 in the Human Development Index^{liii}, received a top score in the V-Dem democracy index^{liv}, and registers a high level of political stability. By all indicators, the Netherlands is in fact a free country. Still, an FvD Facebook ad insists “Let the Netherlands be Free” (images below). These posts remain on Facebook and were viewed 24.5 million times between 17th December 2020 to 17th March 2021.



Chapter 3

3. STOP DE LOCKDOWN

Facebook's COVID-19 policy^{lv} states:

As people around the world confront this unprecedented public health emergency, we want to make sure that our policies help to protect people from harmful content and new types of abuse related to COVID-19 and vaccines. We are working to remove COVID-19 content that contributes to the risk of real-world harm, including through our policies prohibiting coordination of harm, sale of medical masks and related goods, hate speech, bullying and harassment, and misinformation that contributes to the risk of imminent violence or physical harm. Some of these policies require additional information and/or context to enforce, the details of which we have outlined below.

Based on input from experts in health communication and related fields, we are also taking additional steps amid the pandemic to reduce the distribution of content that does not violate our policies but may present misleading or sensationalised information about vaccines in a way that would be likely to discourage vaccinations, as outlined in more detail below.

As the situation evolves, we continue to look at content on the platform, assess speech trends and engage with experts such as the World Health Organization (WHO), government health authorities and stakeholders from across the spectrum of people who use our service, and we will provide additional policy guidance when appropriate to keep the members of our community safe during this crisis.

The policy further states:

More specifically, we remove false information about: The existence or severity of COVID-19.

- *Acknowledging the existence and understanding the severity of COVID-19 is foundational to keeping people safe and aware of the dangers of this public health emergency.*

We remove claims that deny the existence of the disease or undermine the severity of COVID-19. This includes:

- *Claims that deny the existence of the COVID-19 disease or pandemic*
- *Claims that downplay the severity of COVID-19, such as:*
 - **Claims that COVID-19 is no more dangerous to people than the common flu or cold**
 - *Claims that no one has died from COVID-19*
 - *Claims that the mortality rate of COVID-19 is the same or lower than seasonal influenza*
 - *Claims that having a flu jab or flu vaccine is more likely to kill you than COVID-19*
 - *Claims that the number of deaths caused by COVID-19 are much lower than the official figure (requires additional information and/or context)*

Despite Facebook's COVID-19 policy, and repeated assurances^{lvi} by the organization and Mark Zuckerberg^{lvii} on taking progressive measures into limiting COVID-19 disinformation and providing WHO-approved COVID-19 information, our study finds that political messaging during the months following the Dutch elections was filled with COVID-19 disinformation. We focus especially on FvD, as the disproportionately large platform it received has led to real-life distrust towards science and scientists amid the largest public health crisis in living memory. This distrust in authorities and preference for unconfirmed reports is also noted by the 27th February 2021, Nieuwsuur survey that reported^{lviii}:

Half of the people who want to vote for the Forum for Democracy (FvD) think that the COVID-19 virus was deliberately developed to oppress citizens worldwide....The views of FvD voters on conspiracy theories differ from those of the average Dutch person and those of voters of other parties. In comparison: among all Dutch people, 11 percent believe that the virus was deliberately developed and 13 percent that it is a biological weapon. [Emphasis by report writers]

Organic content violating Facebook's Community Policy on COVID-19

On 25th December 2020, FvD's co-founder and leader Thierry Baudet posted a video^{lix} on Facebook. His monologue likens the total number of deaths by COVID-19 to deaths from road accidents and to deaths from the "griep" (seasonal flu). Baudet claims that lockdown measures to control COVID-19 spread are akin to locking down cars to prevent accidents. Throughout the video he downplays the severity of COVID-19. Yet despite Facebook's policy to remove such claims, the message was seen by 1.12 million people and shared by over eleven thousand Facebook users. We flagged the video to Facebook, but it remained online.



The video illustrates a trend in other FvD videos and posters. FvD has repeatedly maintained that COVID-19 is the same as the flu, and has opposed COVID-19 protection measures. Using CrowdTangle, we identified non-ad FvD political messaging and found that in the three months leading up to the Dutch elections (17th December 2020 - 17th March 2021), political video messaging by FvD received 24.5 million views and 2.4 million interactions. The total voter population in the Netherlands is 13.29 million. Below, we discuss a selection of these posts to demonstrate how they clearly violate Facebook's COVID-19 policy. Yet they remain on the platform and continue to generate interaction.

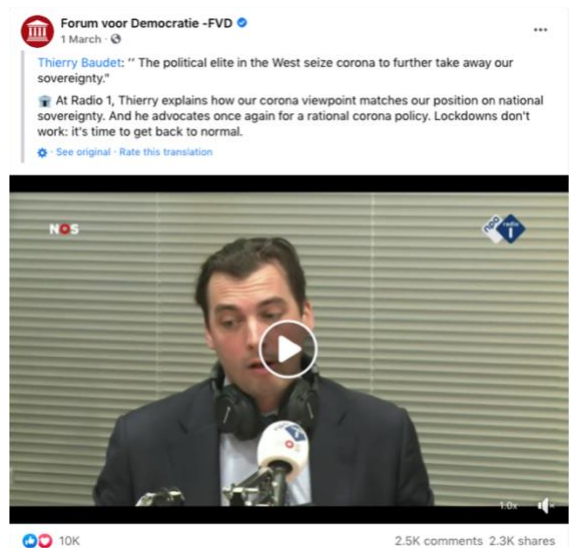
1. In this post,^{lx} Thierry Baudet talks about “misconceptions” about COVID-19 and equates it to the flu. The captions below read “COVID-19 is niet dodlijker dan een stevige griep” (“COVID-19 is not deadlier than a strong flu”). The post was shared 3,600 times. It was flagged to Facebook as Fake Information in the category of health, but it remains on the platform.



2. In this post,^{lxi} FvD states that 24 virologists agree that COVID-19 will become a seasonal flu. The post performed three times better than similar posts. It is accurate that even with a vaccine, COVID-19 will remain within the population and return with slight mutations each year, like the seasonal flu. However, FvD suggests that this means all restrictions should be done away with and alleges that this is “what FvD was saying all along” [translation ours]. The post misrepresents the linked news.



3. In this post,^{lxii} Thierry Baudet claims to explain how COVID-19 provides an opportunity for the political elite in the West to take away the Netherlands’ sovereignty. He further adds that the party’s views on COVID-19 matches the party’s position on national sovereignty. The messaging is remarkably similar to the “great reset”^{lxiii} conspiracy theory which proposes that a global elite is using COVID-19 as an opportunity to roll out radical policies such as forced vaccinations, digital ID cards and the renunciation of private property.



4. Far-right political actors have also regularly engaged with the Q anon styled conspiracy theories which closely align with

disinformation on vaccines, COVID-19 and lockdowns. For example, [this post](#)^{lxiv} which is also posted on [FvD's page](#),^{lxv} Baudet claims to explain how people at the World Economic Forum are trying to “reset”^{lxvi} the world to the detriment of mankind. This endorses the “great reset” conspiracy first propounded by Steve Bannon.^{lxvii} The video was viewed 137.2K times.



5. In [this post](#),^{lxviii} coalition leaders are photo-shopped next to Klaus Schwab of the World Economic Forum. Each poster has the caption “Build Back Better”^{lxix}, a catchphrase which denotes the alleged intentions of economic and political elites to dominate the world as per the Q anon conspiracy thinkers. The post in its essence endorses the “great reset” conspiracy.



6. This next post^{lxx} again, promotes the “great reset” conspiracy theory^{lxxi}. It was viewed 231.7K times, shared over 3.1K times and performs 4.3 times better than other similar posts on Facebook.

All these Posts were flagged by our team of researchers to Facebook, yet remain on the platform where they continue to generate wide interactions and views.



7. In the final post^{lxxii} of our selection, Thierry Baudet questions the alleged “over-mortality” of COVID-19 and says that the “Cartel Media”^{lxxiii} is keeping people in the dark. Using CrowdTangle, we found that the post performed 1.5 times better than normal, with over 820 shares and 48.8K views.

The post is closely aligned with QAnon conspiracies and COVID-19 disinformation.



Paid Content Violating Community and Ad Policy

Other than these organically-grown posts, we also investigated FvD ads. Based on the Facebook COVID-19 policy, we classified FvD ads as follows:

Table 1 – FvD advertisement classification

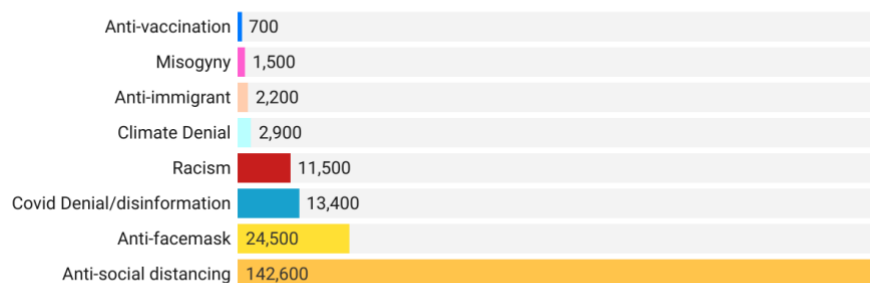
Classify as	If the ad contains claims of:
Anti-vaccination / vaccine disinformation	DNA microchipping, vaccine rejection, DNA modification, vaccines do not exist or have not been approved, claims about safety or serious side effect, vaccines kill or cause serious harm, vaccines cause autism, natural immunity is better than vaccination immunity, vaccine are unsafe for specific groups of people (where specific group relates to social status, religion or political views), vaccine cause infertility, irrational side-effects, no-immunity claims, no-prevention claims, development or ingredient claims, toxicity claims, micro-chipping, animal product like beef or pork, claims of being untested, satanic vaccine claims, trial doubts, death because of vaccine during trial, claims including conspiracy theories, population control claims, vaccine targeting claims. The policy forms a part of Facebook’s COVID-19 misinformation removal policy
Anti-facemask	Wearing a facemask does not confer protection, wearing facemasks can make you ill, masks have 5G tech, claims that public health communities do not recommend masks. The policy forms a part of Facebook’s COVID-19 misinformation removal policy
COVID-19 hate-speech.	COVID-19 is caused by people of specific identity groups (for example COVID-19 jihad). The policy forms a part of Facebook’s COVID-19 misinformation removal policy
COVID-19 denial / disinformation	Denying or undermining severity (example: flu, common cold, no deaths from COVID-19, where did the influenza go, flu is more likely to kill, much less death from COVID-19). Social distancing orders are for installing 5G, flu jab giving COVID-19, 5g technology gives COVID-19, houseflies and mosquitos cause COVID-19. Claims that a group is immune to COVID-19. Claims that tests do not help, not everybody needs to test, tests can infect, tests cannot detect COVID-19. The policy forms a part of Facebook’s COVID-19 misinformation removal policy
Anti-social distancing	Ads claiming ‘ <i>Social distancing does not help</i> ’ or ads claiming ‘stop the lockdown’ tend to undermine Facebook COVID-19 policies and must be read in the larger context of the actor, and the environment. This is a borderline content.
Climate denial	The ad denies the anthropogenic nature of climate change. Facebook do not currently have a clear policy on climate denial of skepticism.
Anti-immigrant	The ads call for stopping immigration, depicts refugees as amassed groups which must be stopped. There is no clear Facebook policy towards anti-immigrant narrative which can be built on the back

	of Agenda 24 of Global Compact on Migration. However, Facebook have a policy against hate-speech which includes hate speech against immigrants; against stereotyping and against othering.
Misogyny	The ad uses gender stereotyping including hatred of, contempt for, or prejudice against women or girls. Facebook have a policy against hate-speech which includes hate speech because of gender; against stereotyping and against othering.
Racism	The ad uses stereotyping, including hatred of, contempt for or prejudice against a group of people based on their perceived physical characteristics. Facebook have a policy against hate-speech which includes hate speech directed because of race; against stereotyping and against othering.

According to our Facebook Ad Library investigations, FvD ran over 267 ads from 10th December 2020 to 15th March 2021. Of these, we classified 148 ads as some form of COVID-19 denial, COVID-19 disinformation, anti-facemask or anti-social distancing, while at least 18 ads were classified as anti-migrant, racist, misogynistic or climate denial (Table below, numbers are in Euros).

FvD Ad Spent (in Euros)

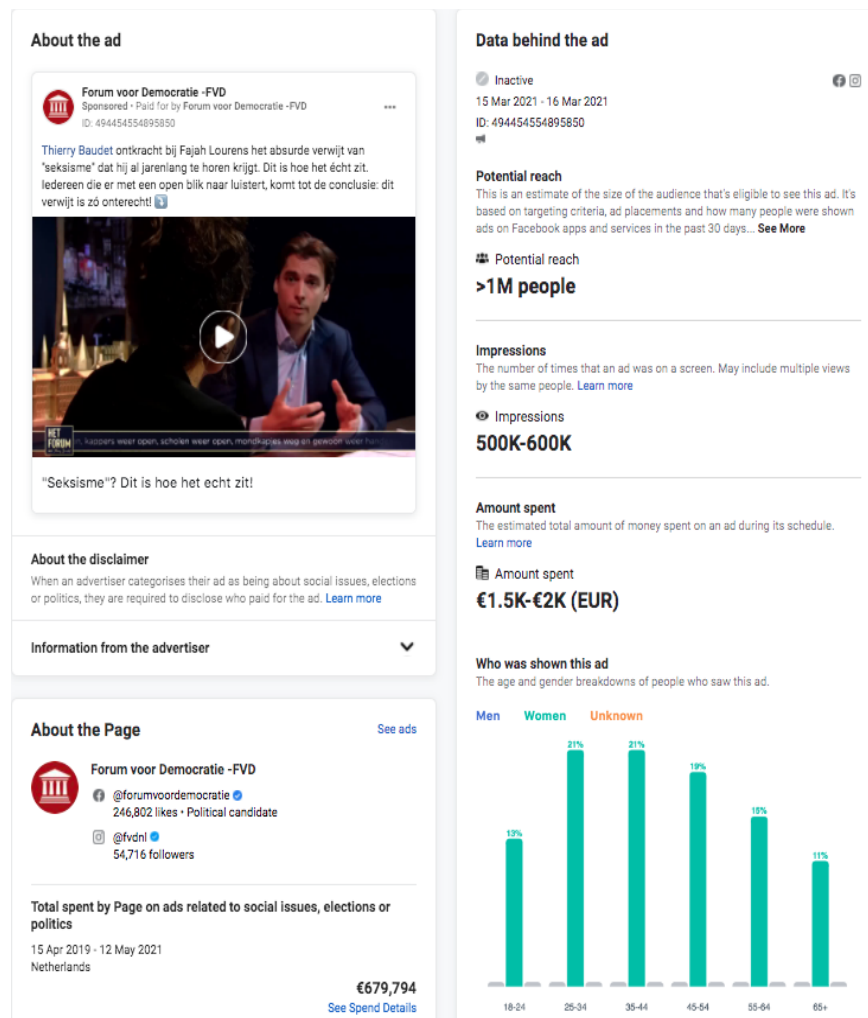
Facebook Ads labeled from 10.12.2020-15.03.2021



Source: M van Dorssen via Facebook Ad Library • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 8 – FvD ad spend in Euros, 10th December - 15th March 2021

Between December 2020 and March 2021, these ads provided Facebook with at least 199,300.00 Euros in revenue. Two ads, [ID: 279724440256753](#) and [ID: 1305215086545772](#), were taken down by Facebook. However, as Facebook do not provide a particular reason for taking down those ads it is hard to decipher why these ads were deleted while several other ads which actively violate Facebook Policy or are borderline content continue to remain on the platform. In addition to COVID-19 disinformation ads, FvD also ran at least one misogynist ad during this period. Notably, this ad was targeted only at women. The ad shows Baudet saying to a female journalist that “women in general have less ambition” [our translation]. The ad in question with [ID: 494454554895850](#) generated 2,000 Euros in revenue for Facebook and was viewed by 500,000 to 600,000 women, the majority of whom (42%) were aged 18-34 years. Baudet’s misogyny has been previously noted in the popular media. That the ad was designed to show only to women on a “community focused” platform like Facebook speaks volumes about Facebook’s own stand on misogyny.



Overall, it emerges that despite Facebook's claims to be proactively tackling COVID-misinformation, discriminatory ad-targeting and hate speech, it has continued to allow and profit from sensational, and xenophobic content and disinformation. Between 15th March 2019 and 15th March 2021, the primary Facebook pages of the parties we tracked ran a total of 31, 125 political ads. This is an average of 44 ads per day. **Of these ads, at least 1,095 political ads costing a total of 56,845 Euros ran without a disclaimer, despite Facebook's policy requirement for a minimalist disclaimer^{lxxiv} containing the advertiser's name and contact details.** These 31,125 ads were shown to 10.2 million Facebook users, primarily Dutch citizens residing in the Netherlands.

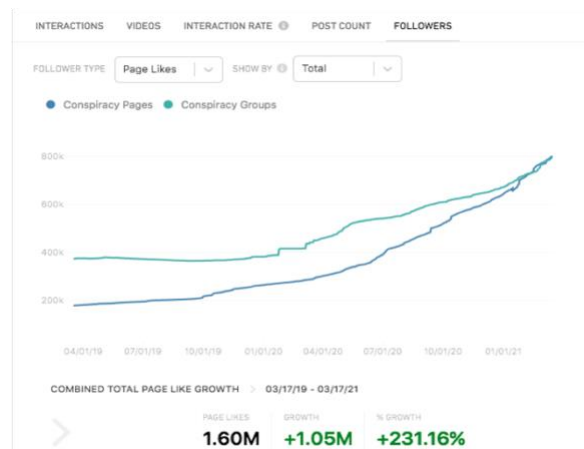
While there is no methodology to ascertain how precisely political disinformation on Facebook strengthened the COVID-19 infodemic, our analysis of the disinformation landscape shows that the political disinformation campaigns certainly contributed to and perhaps also accelerated the infodemic in Netherlands. In the next chapter, we discuss how COVID-19 disinformation is flourishing in the Netherlands through the Qanon circles and amounts to an infodemic.

Chapter 4

4. Chasing QAnon down the rabbit hole

Starting today, we will remove any Facebook Pages, Groups and Instagram accounts representing QAnon, even if they contain no violent content.^{lxxv}

In August 2020, Facebook pledged to remove content representing QAnon. Yet, in part because it does not have a viable flagging system in place to report QAnon related information (which we explore further in Chapter 5), Facebook remains a viable platform for QAnon believers to spread dangerous conspiracy theories. QAnon is a conspiracy network with roots in the United States, which since its first sighting on 28th October 2017, has spread across the globe and has a strong following in the Netherlands. We found the Dutch Facebook landscape infested with QAnon conspiracies. **There are at least 170 groups and pages (91 pages and 89 groups) which spread QAnon conspiracies and COVID-19 disinformation.** These groups actively promote COVID-19 disinformation, conspiracy theories revolving around COVID-19 vaccination, and threw doubt upon the purposes of lockdowns and often led and participated in the anti-lockdown protests which at times became violent. These groups and pages not only regularly create new content but, as we will show in this chapter, also cross-share content across platforms. We studied these pages and groups using Crowd Tangle and found that despite Facebook's promise to remove and limit QAnon and COVID-19 disinformation, these pages continue to grow. In two years between 17th March 2019 to March 17th 2021 **1.6 million additional Dutch-speaking users** had liked or followed these pages and groups (see image below).

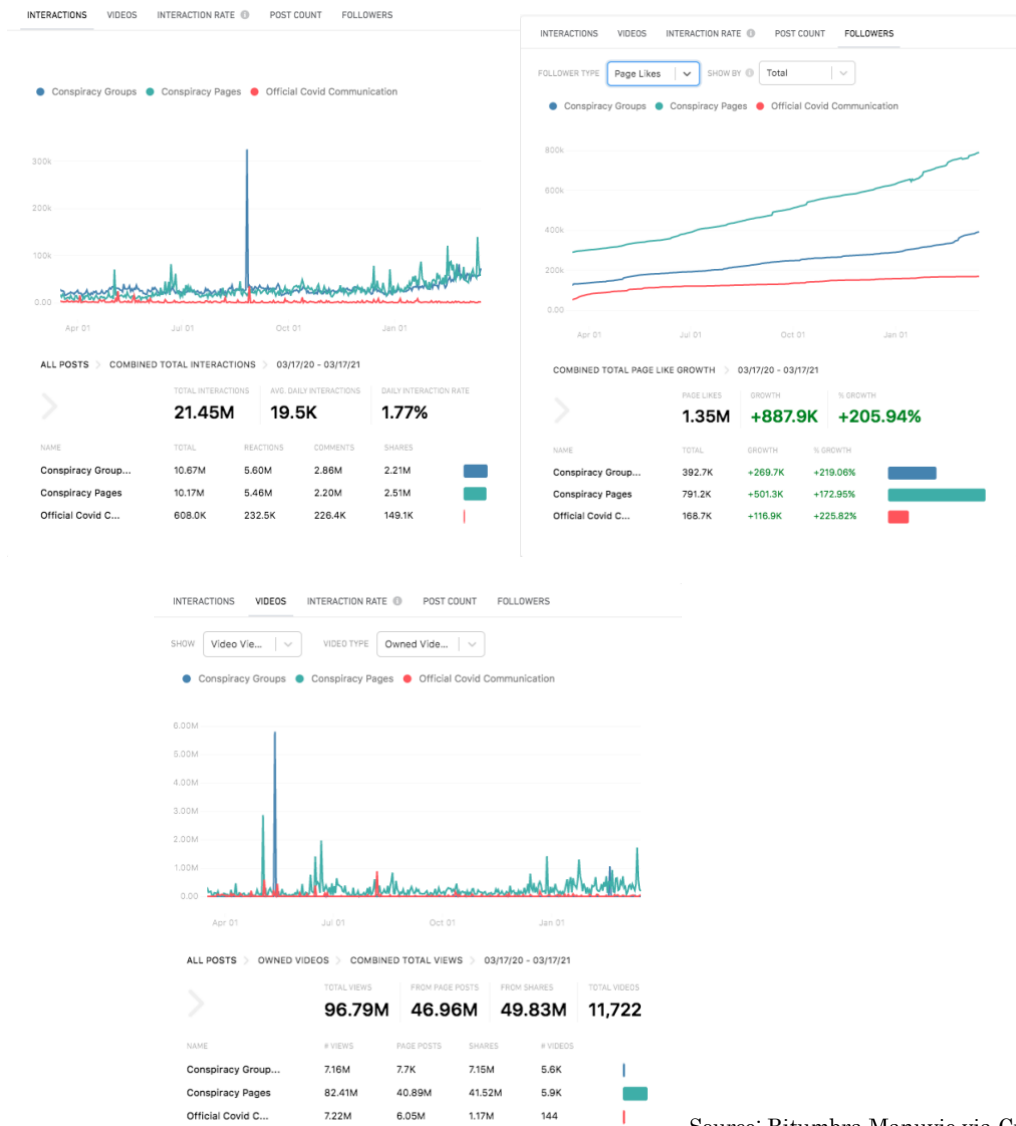


Source: Ritumbra Manuvie via Crowd Tangle

Figure 9 – Follower growth of conspiracy groups and pages, 17th March 2019 – 17th March 2021

We created a live display to monitor the growth of these pages and COVID-19 specific hashtags in the Netherlands, which can be viewed [here](#).^{lxxvi} The images are taken from Crowd Tangle intelligence and shows the growth in page likes for those on the Conspiracy Page List [CT list no. 1508524] and the Conspiracy Groups List [CT List no. 1508525]. Our Crowd Tangle lists do not contain any of the political candidates and parties discussed in Chapter 3, even where such political candidates are actively endorsing misinformation for political gains. Using the lists, we saw a continuous rise in interaction that accelerated towards the election campaigns and decreased immediately afterwards. To put this in perspective, we

added the official COVID-19 communication channels to the graph, such as the verified RIVM handle and GGD handle [CT List 1522540]. We do not take into account the COVID-19 information transmitted through accounts of health workers, hospitals, media-houses or political actors simply because these accounts also share information other than COVID-19 information, whereas the conspiracy groups and pages that we are monitoring exclusively share concerns and misinformation surrounding COVID-19, COVID-19 regulations, COVID-19 vaccines and talk about COVID-19 as some ‘sinister plan’ of the global elite. As can be seen in the three images, the official COVID-19 communication channel (red line) has a far lower page following and lower level of interactions compared to the conspiracy pages (green line) and conspiracy groups (blue line).



Source: Ritumbra Manuvie via Crowd Tangle

Figure 10 – Daily Interactions (top left), Daily page like total (top right) and video views (bottom left) according to conspiracy groups and pages or official COVID-19 communication

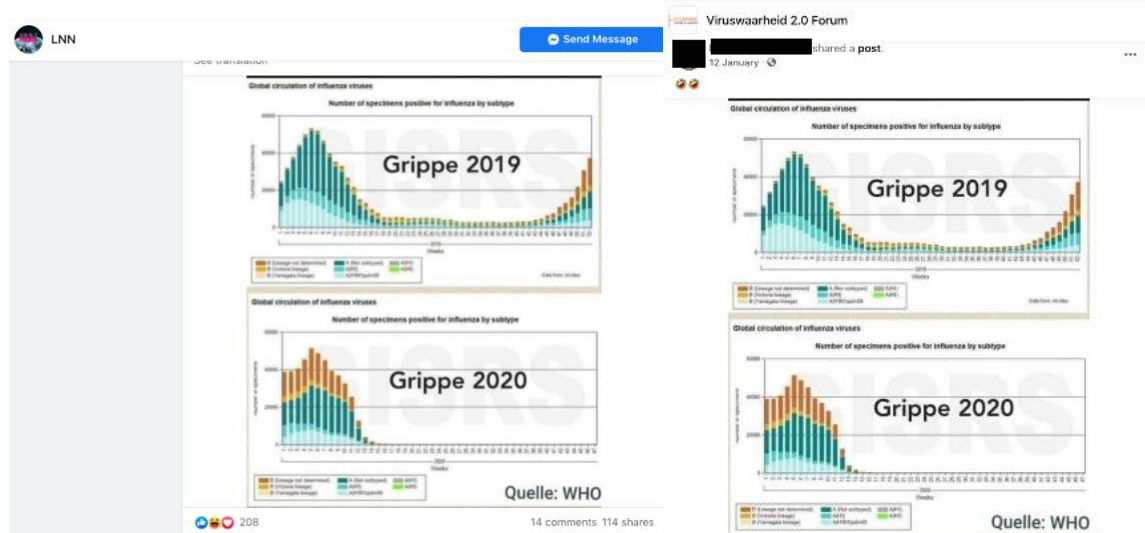
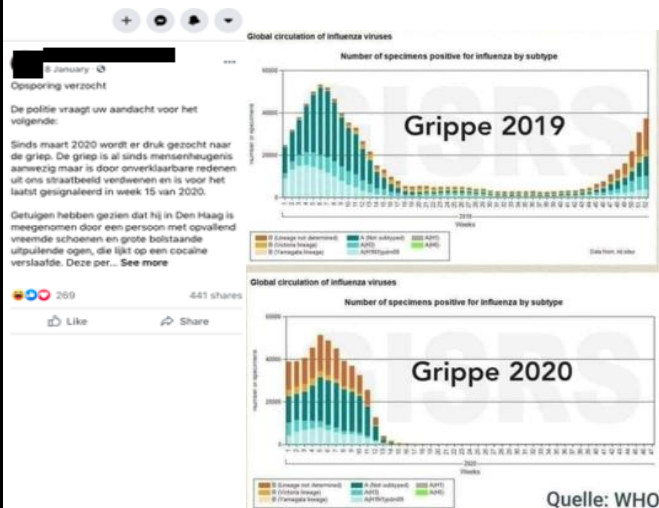
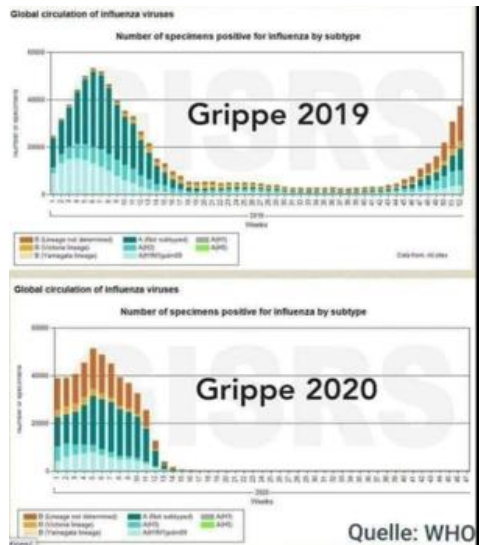
The video content of the conspiracy pages received over 89.57 million views in the period between 17th March 2020 and 17th March 2020¹, whereas that of official COVID-19 communication was seen only 7.2 million times. These results coincides with the study by

Eurofound which revealed that 54.9% of surveyed respondents in the Netherlands believe that the risk of COVID-19 is exaggerated (a claim in line with FvD's political messaging) and 24.9% are 'very unlikely' to take vaccination against COVID-19.^{lxxvii} The EuroFound survey corresponds to the February/March survey of RIVM where the likelihood of being vaccinated or intention for vaccination was found in 78% people, since the roll-out of the vaccination the willingness has now improved to 87%.^{lxxviii} Yet a gap of 13% remains towards vaccine hesitancy and it is worth understanding how social media and misinforming political messaging might be contributing towards it.

In the following section, we first discuss the content of COVID-19 misinformation and show how it continues to influence Dutch Facebook users despite Facebook's third-party fact-checking. We then discuss the key actors in the disinformation landscape of the Netherlands who are not de-platformed by Facebook despite their repeated violation of the Facebook's policy and inspite of Facebook's commitment to de-platform repeat offenders.

COVID-19 is an "elite conspiracy"

Over the last year, COVID-19 conspiracy theories which equate the pandemic to some kind of "elite plan" to chip people and/or depopulate the planet have grown widely. Despite Facebook's own commitment to counter the COVID-19 related infodemic, we continue to find disinformation and conspiracies on Facebook. For example, this post^{lxxix} likening COVID-19 to the flu was fact-checked by AFP Fact-Checker^{lxxx} – Facebook's authorized fact-checkers in the Netherlands – yet it continues to be shared with slight variations in messaging across personal Facebook profiles, pages^{lxxxi} and groups^{lxxxii} without any COVID-19 labeling by Facebook. When compiling this report, we again reported these posts (on 15th May 2021).



In a similar vein, we found posts on Dutch Facebook groups and pages that suggested that COVID-19 vaccines change human DNA and which proclaimed that vaccinations were “medical experiments”. For example, the [post below^{lxxxiii}](#) was shared 247 times and remains on Facebook without any COVID-19 labeling. It says, translated by Facebook's own translation and reviewed by a native-Dutch speaker:

28 February

Bill Gates en Mark Zuckerberg vinden er geen doekjes om: de nieuwe vaccins veranderen inderdaad het menselijk DNA. Wat de gevolgen op lange termijn zijn, weten ze echter niet... Elon Musk legt uit dat je met synthetische DNA of RNA een mens in een vlinder kunt veranderen. Dr. Carrie Madej waarschuwt voor het plan om de originele mensheid te laten ophouden, en een nieuwe kunstmatige mens te laten ontstaan, die gekoppeld is aan technologie. Het World Economic Forum verklaart dat we allemaal cyborgs moeten worden. Zuckerberg geeft zelfs toe dat hijzelf ook 'ooit mens was'.

Het scenario van een sci-fi film, of werkelijkheid?
Kijk en oordeel zelf...

See translation



STOPWORLDCONTROL.COM

Wereldleiders erkennen: het vaccin verandert ons DNA!

Bill Gates en Mark Zuckerberg erkennen dat de nieuwe vaccins ons DNA veranderen. Het ei...

14

4 comments 247 shares

Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg do not mind: the new vaccines are indeed changing human DNA. They do not know what the long-term consequences are, however... Elon Musk explains that with synthetic DNA or RNA you can turn a human into a butterfly. Dr. Klein. Carrie Madej warns against the plan to stop original humanity and to create a new artificial human being linked to technology. The World Economic Forum declares that we should all become cyborgs. Zuckerberg even admits that he himself was "once human" too. The scenario of a sci-fi movie, or reality? Watch and judge for yourself...

Vrij en Sociaal Nederland VSN



GEEN THERAPIE

GEN-THERAPIE

Vrij en Sociaal Nederland is voor medische vrijheid

VSN

**word nu lid en
stem 17 maart
vrijensociaal.nl**

Lijst 30, a political party formed by COVID-19 measure skeptic Willem Engel (on whom we provide more details below) makes posts such as this which promote "Geen Vaccination" (No vaccination) over "Gen-Vaccination" (Gene Vaccination). Engel has shared other such COVID-19 skeptic and scientifically inaccurate posts, which we discuss below.

In this post, Engel posts on his own profile, and uses a photo frame to promote a debunked theory that COVID-19 vaccinations modify DNA.^{lxxxiv} In response to one of the comments, Willem Engel writes:^{lxxxv}



García It can happen via 2 routes. RNA interacting with your DNA, up or downregulating the transcription of certain genes. (epigenetics) Or via RTase and integrase modifying your DNA, inserting the cDNA (made from the RNA) into your genome. The latter route is less likely but permanent. It is not a matter of if but when. This new thechnology is just the start. the next jab will be not modRNA (modified so it is more stabile, the current cormirnaty) but saRNA (self ampyfying) [sic.] (Copied verbitum)

These posts were repeatedly flagged to Facebook by our team of researchers, yet they remain on the platform and do not have a warning label at the time of writing this report. The Dutch network of conspiracy spreaders is fraternized by several key influencers who themselves espouse QAnon beliefs. This includes media influencers like Robert Jensen, and Lange Frans; self-admitted QAnon followers like Janet Ossebaard, and political actors like Thierry Baudet (FvD), Wybren van Haga (FvD) and Willem Engel (Lijst 30).

Hash Tag WWG1WGA.

#WWG1WGA – where we go one, we go all – is a well-known QAnon hashtag (and the title of a QAnon authored book) used across various platforms by Q supporters. We used Crowd Tangle insight function to identify actor-networks using this hashtag in the Netherlands between 17th March 2020 and 17th March 2021. Several of the groups that we have previously identified as conspiracy spreading groups, and influencers who we believed to be espousing QAnon theories have used this hashtag to endorse their commitment to the QAnon movement. In the remainder of this chapter, we discuss how certain Facebook users continue to downplay COVID-19 and spread misinformation about vaccines, while, despite its own policies, Facebook continues to ignore the infodemic. We start with Robert Jansen’s Facebook presence and then discuss Lange Frans and several people who have appeared on “Lange Frans’ Facebook Show,” which peddles COVID-19 disinformation and conspiracy theories.

Robert Jensen

Robert Jensen is a Dutch influencer openly aligned with QAnon. He runs “The Jensen Show”, on Facebook and cross-posts content to his website, jensen.nl^{lxxxvi}. The Facebook page of Robert Jensen^{lxxxvii} is verified and has 86,000 followers. Over two years, Jensen has made more than 325 webcasts which are regularly shared on Facebook. These webcast episode feature titles (translated to English): “There is nothing going on”^{lxxxviii} (73.9K views), “We are

being cheated"^{lxxxix} (48K views), "Devilish Deception"^{xc}, "Don't fall for it"^{xc_i}, "Voter fraud lurking"^{xc_{ii}}, "Conspiracy thinkers were right"^{xc_{iii}}, "Cojona Misleading"^{xc_{iv}}, "Manipulation"^{xc_v}. Majority of the content posted on Jansen's Facebook page closely align to QAnon belief

Thierry Baudet of FvD has appeared twice on his podcasts: Guest Thierry Baudet Part 1 #317^{xc_{vi}} (84.9K views) and Guest: Thierry Baudet Part 2 #318^{xc_{vii}} (33.1K views). The most viewed video totals 205K views on Facebook. In a tweet from Jensen^{xc_{viii}} in May 2020, he says that his video "Stop the Lockdown" had been deleted without warning.

His webcast Er is niks aan de hand (There is nothing going on)^{xc_{ix}} was viewed 73.9K times and was shared 445 times on Facebook.

This post was flagged to Facebook as False Information, it continues to be on the platform



In his webcast We Worden Belazerd (We are being Cheated)^c, viewed 49K times, Jansen is seen wearing merchandise emblazoned with the message, "media = virus" which he is selling alongside Trump merchandise.

This post was flagged to Facebook as False Information, it continues to be on the platform

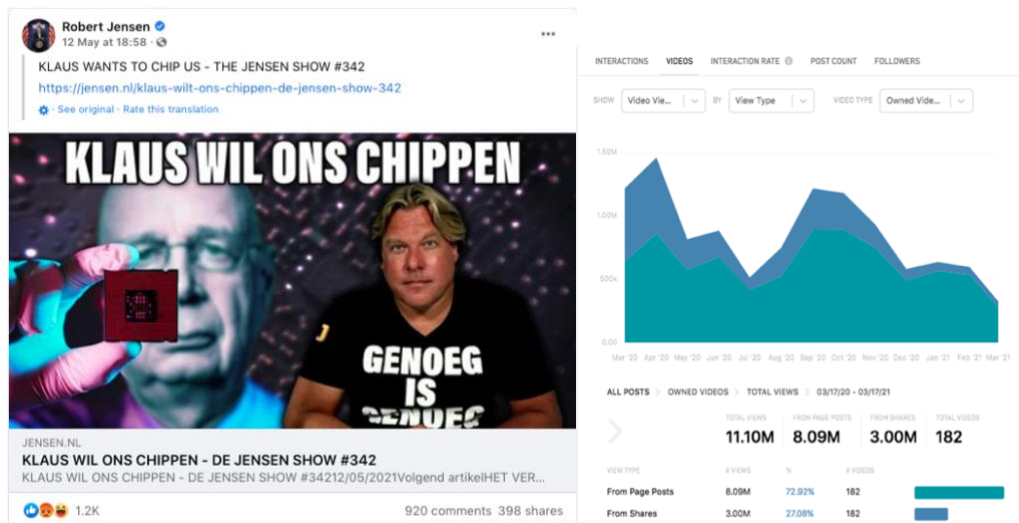


Jensen's webcast, Duivelse Misleiding^{ci} was viewed 71K times.

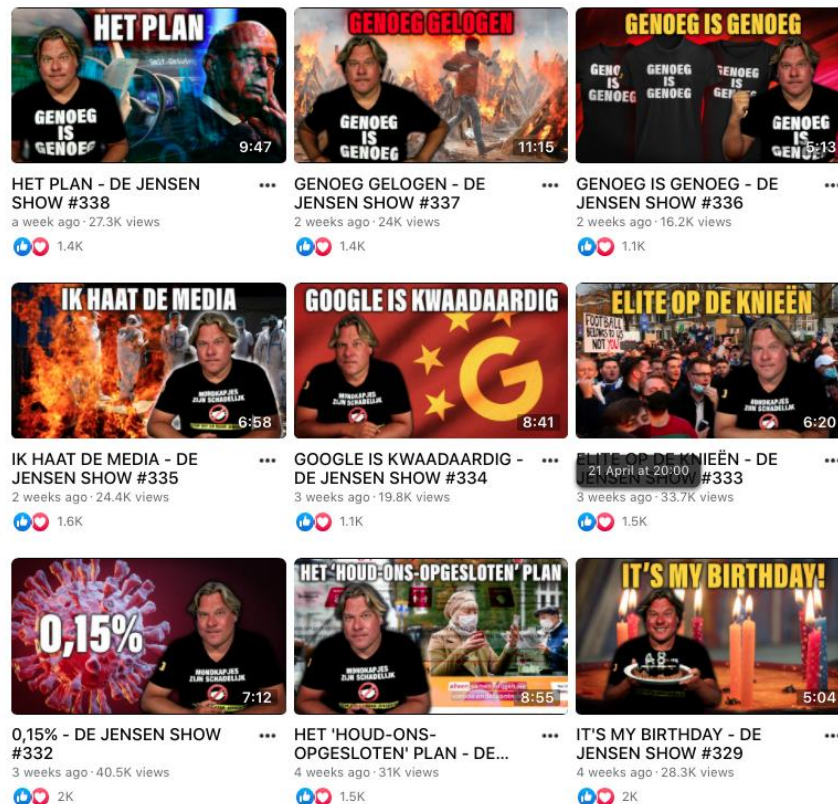
This post was flagged to Facebook as False Information, it continues to be on the platform



Next is a screenshot of a promo posted on 12th May 2021, on Jensen's Facebook page, which promotes QAnon style conspiracy theories. Between 12th and 15th May alone, the post was shared 398 times. From 17th March 2020 to 17th March 2021, Jensen's Facebook Page videos were viewed 11.4 million times. According to Crowd Tangle analysis, 11.1 million of these views lasted at least 3 minutes. The posts and pages were flagged to Facebook under diverse categories, yet it continues to be on the platform

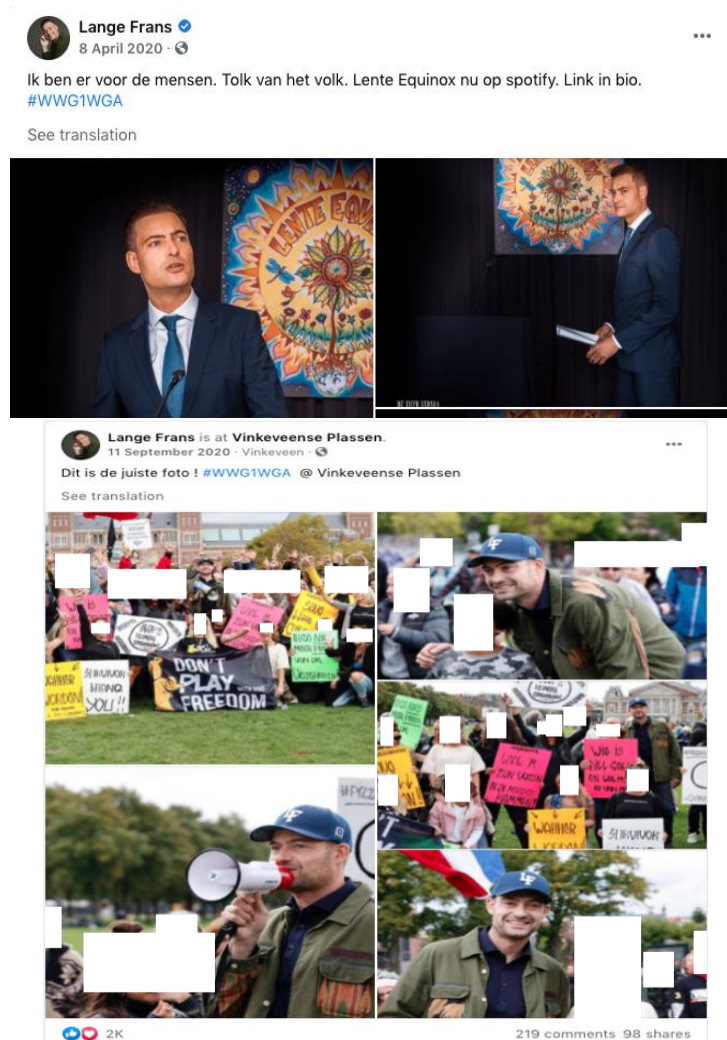


Below is an overview of more recent videos from the page of Robert Jensen on Facebook^{cii} which continues to receive thousands of views. This page was flagged to Facebook however, it continues to be on the platform.



Lange Frans

Lange Frans also has a verified Facebook page^{ciii} with 42,000 followers in a known influencer in Netherlands. Among other things Lange Frans has ties with the FvD dating back to December 2019, when he collaborated with Thierry Baudet on the song The Country of FVD^{civ}. The song is available on YouTube and has been posted on Facebook in Team Thierry Baudet^{cv} groups with 527 likes and 225 shares. Frans is also openly a QAnon believer. In an April 2020 post, Lange Frans used **QAnon's well-known hashtag #WWG1WGA**^{cvi}. He believes, among other things, that the Dutch government consists of a satanic blood drinking elite. His page and posts have been reported to Facebook, yet they continue to be online in spite of Facebook policy violations.



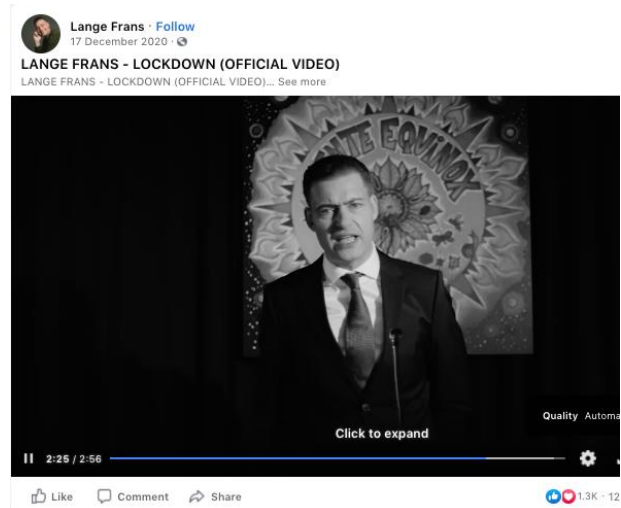
In August 2020, he shared a video^{cvii} of US conspiracy theorist R.F. Kennedy's speech in Berlin from the news site RT DE^{cviii}. The video was viewed nearly 8 million times on YouTube, before being taken down. The post remains available on Facebook.

This post was flagged to Facebook, it remains online.



In April 2020, Lange Frans wrote a Lockdown song^{cix}, which is available on Facebook with more than 23K views. In the song, Frans raps about “Donald Trump being the Saviour who puts an end to a pedophile network across the world which includes the Oranje [Royal Family] of the Netherlands.” Throughout the song he repeats “Fall of cabal, where we go one we go all”.

This post was reported to Facebook as dangerous organization (because of its glorification of QAnon, which is classified by Facebook as a dangerous organization)



While Frans’ YouTube channel has been taken down^{cx} several times, his Facebook profile remains unscathed. In July 2020, Lange Frans started a series of podcasts on Facebook, to which he regularly invited QAnon believers and public figures spreading COVID-19 disinformation. The following paragraphs discuss the people and politicians on his guest list and establish each of their roles in spreading QAnon theories. It is worth repeating that as Frans was de-platformed from Youtube, these Podcasts are made for the Facebook audience.

Willem Engel

Willem Engel is a self-proclaimed “human rights activist” who caused a stir in the Dutch legal landscape by challenging COVID-19 curfews and the possibility of a compulsory COVID-19 vaccination. In May 2020, Engel founded the Viruswaarheid^{cxii} (Virus Truth) Foundation and Viruswaarheid 2.0^{cxiii}, which have 66,661 and 22,040 followers respectively on Facebook. Followers show acceptance of, and actively promote, QAnon conspiracy theories. For example, these include claims that COVID-19 measures are an attempt by the global elite to cover up a massive global pedophile operation and satanic ring, and/or to accelerate a “great reset” and start a New World Order, which only Donald Trump can prevent. Viruswaarheid regularly organizes petitions and Facebook live videos, and participates in anti-COVID-19 measure protests across the Netherlands. One of the very first petitions initiated by Viruswaarheid against the Dutch COVID-19 Ordinance was signed by quarter of a million^{cxiii} Dutch citizens. Willem Engel was hosted by Lange Frans on his Spotify podcast on 17th December 2020. The video from the show^{cxiv} remains on Facebook despite Facebook's policy towards removing and limiting COVID-19 disinformation. This post was flagged to Facebook.



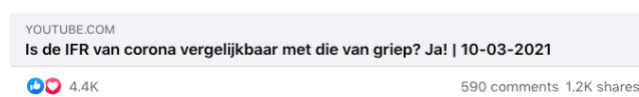
Wybren van Haga

Wybren van Haga is a former member of the House of Representatives for the VVD who assumed office on 31st October 2017. On 24th September 2019, he was expelled^{cxv} from the VVD group, after being criticized three times over his dual role as an MP and entrepreneur. **In May 2020, he joined the Forum for Democracy^{cxvi} (FvD) and assumed the second rank in the FvD's electoral list in 2020.** His campaigning relies heavily on anti-COVID-19 measure messaging. Such messaging relies heavily on false claims.

On 23rd February 2021, van Haga appeared in a photo on Facebook in which he posed with a poster that reads: "Stop testing today and the pandemic is over. Think for yourself." The post was shared 257 times. This post was flagged to Facebook.



In another post from 11th March 2021, van Haga posted a video^{cxvii} (4.4K likes, 593 comments, shared 1.3K times), in which he likened COVID-19 to the flu. The video has been taken down by YouTube, but the post which was shared on Facebook is still available. This post was flagged to Facebook.



During the 2021 elections, van Haga scored exceptionally well. He received 241,193 votes^{cxviii}, only 42,000 fewer than list leader Baudet. Van Haga's followers on social media have also been increasing. Van Haga has 81,977 followers on Facebook. In Frans' podcast episode^{cxix} with van Haga, both downplay the severity of COVID-19. The podcast, which has been flagged, remains available on Facebook and has been viewed 24K times.



Sven Hulleman

Sven Hulleman is a lawyer who advocates conspiracy theories through videos, podcasts and social media. He is the founder of the Een Oorlog Reeds Verloren Facebook Page^{cx}, a Facebook group^{cxii} with the same name and a website named "Een Oorlog Reeds Verloren"^{cxiii} ("A war already lost"). The page and group are administered by a different team which continues to post Sven Hulleman's content. In January 2021, Hulleman created another Facebook page with name NOOIT.nl^{cxiii} and a website^{cxiv} with the same name. The posts on these platforms continue to downplay the severity of COVID-19, and allege harm caused by vaccines. These posts were flagged to Facebook. Hulleman's YouTube channel^{cxv} now has 57.3K followers. YouTube deleted four of Hulleman's videos because "YouTube does not allow claims about COVID-19 vaccinations that violate consensus among experts from local health authorities or the World Health Organization (WHO)". YouTube also prevented Hulleman from uploading new content for one week. Lange Frans invited Hulleman^{cxvi} to his show, the video podcast of which has 4.4K views and 287 likes. In the video, Frans and Hulleman defend conspiracy theories (for example that the people who died in the MH17 crash are still alive), and discuss the book "5Gates, about a long-prepared pandemic, the police problem and what is really going on..."^{cxvii}.



Elke de Klerk

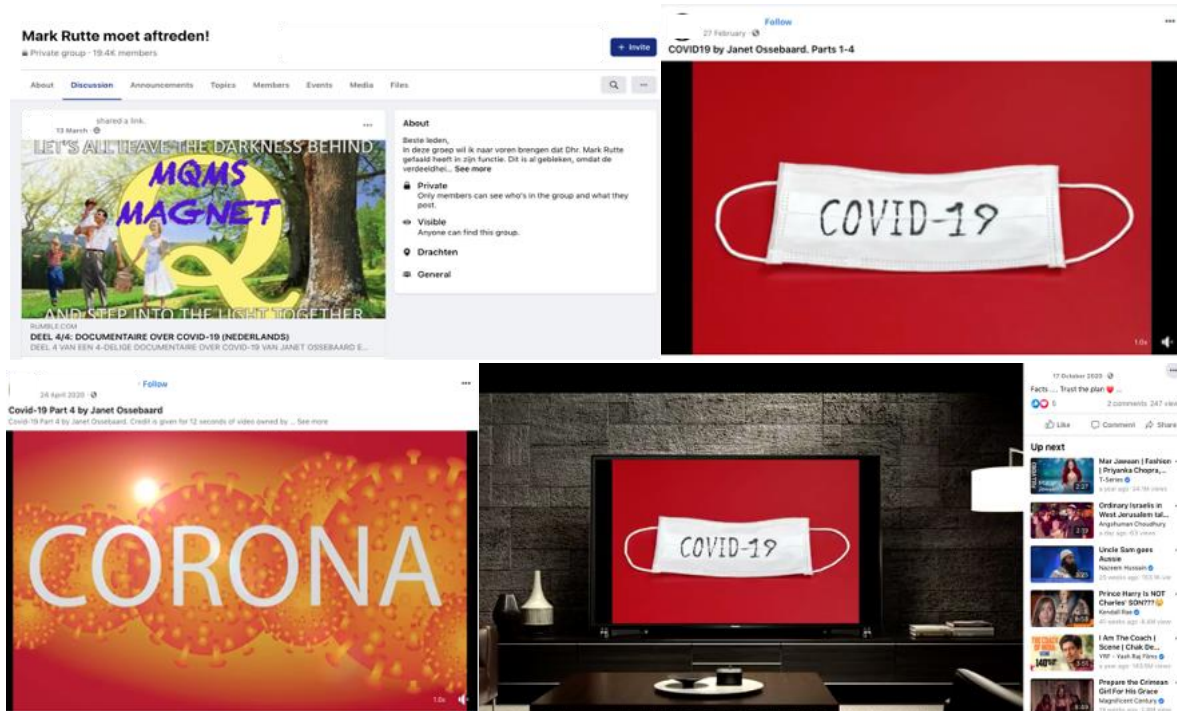
Lange Frans's podcast with Elke de Klerk^{cxxviii} received 32.9K views and 1.4K likes. De Klerk is connected to the Dutch wing of the John Birch Society^{cxxix}, an American far-right organization. De Klerk defends the idea that people who are vaccinated are injected with a microchip. This post was flagged to Facebook.



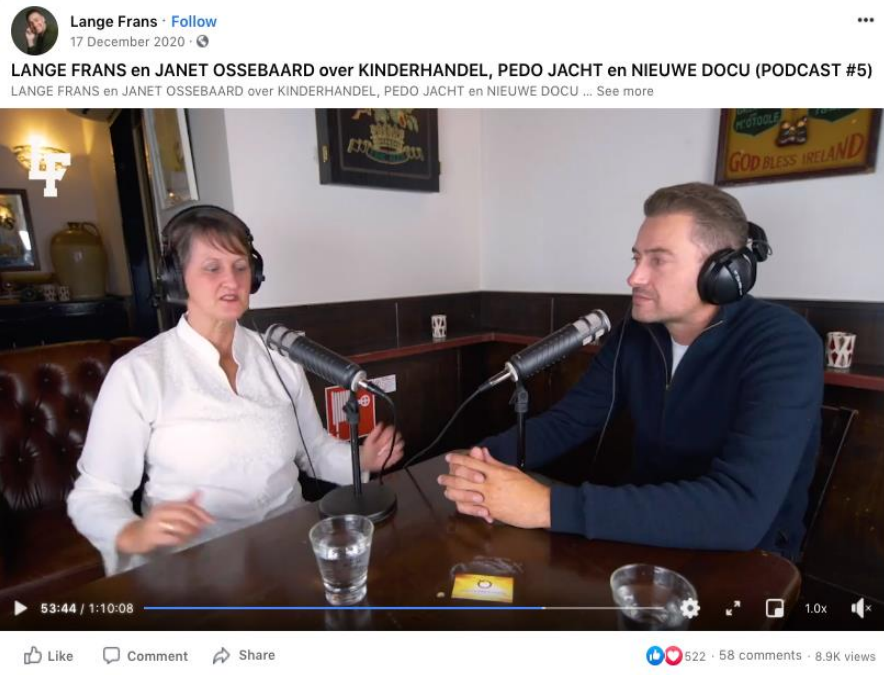
Janet Ossebaard

Janet Ossebaard is a Dutch QAnon believer who has self-identified as a QAnon supporter since 2017. In the summer of 2019 she created a viral documentary named Valcabal^{cxxx}, seen via the hyperlink on her website. The documentary has been translated into 16 languages and viewed millions of times all over the world. In it, Ossebaard alleges that a shadow government called the Cabal of Illuminati (consisting of the Rockefellers, the Rothschilds, Bill Gates, George Soros, as well as the Clintons and Obamas) aims to dominate the world and is alleged to be engaged in child abuse and satanic rituals. With the advent of COVID-19, Ossebaard made a four-part documentary about COVID-19, which is available on several

private Facebook groups, such as “Rutte has to step down”^{cxxxi} (19.4K followers), Truthseeker UK^{cxxxii} (206 views), Belize online Advertising^{cxxxiii} (373 views), Ramon Vdf Kisoor (in Dutch)^{cxxxiv} (246 views). These post were flagged to Facebook.

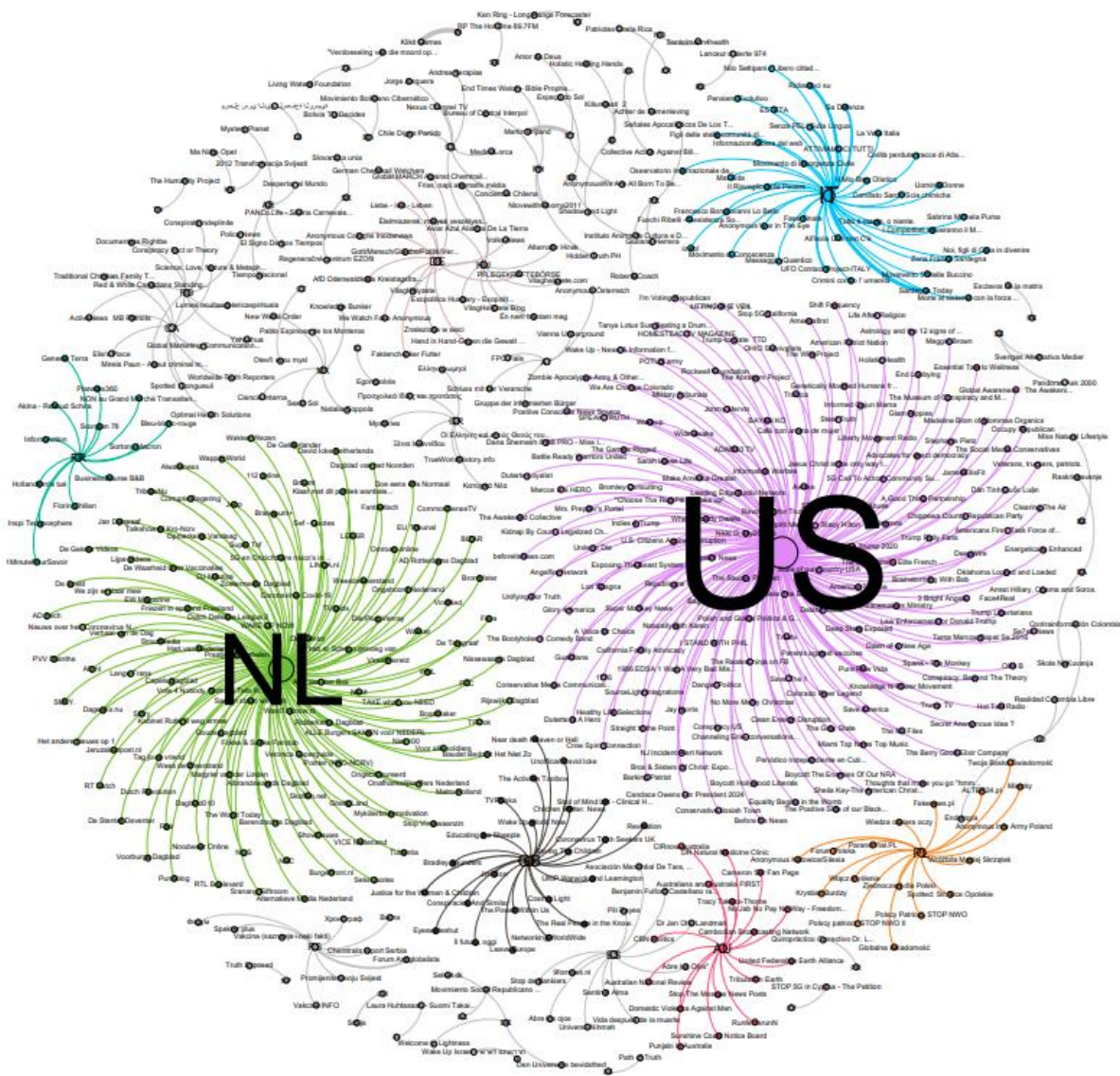


In August 2020, Frans^{cxxxv} invited Janet Ossebaard onto his podcast, in the course of which they fantasized^{cxxxvi} about shooting President Rutte and exposing the high-ranking pedophile network alleged by QAnon. YouTube took down this video because of the death threats made towards the Prime Minister of the Netherlands. While Facebook removed Janet Ossebaard's profile altogether, the video remained on Facebook despite being flagged by our team several times.

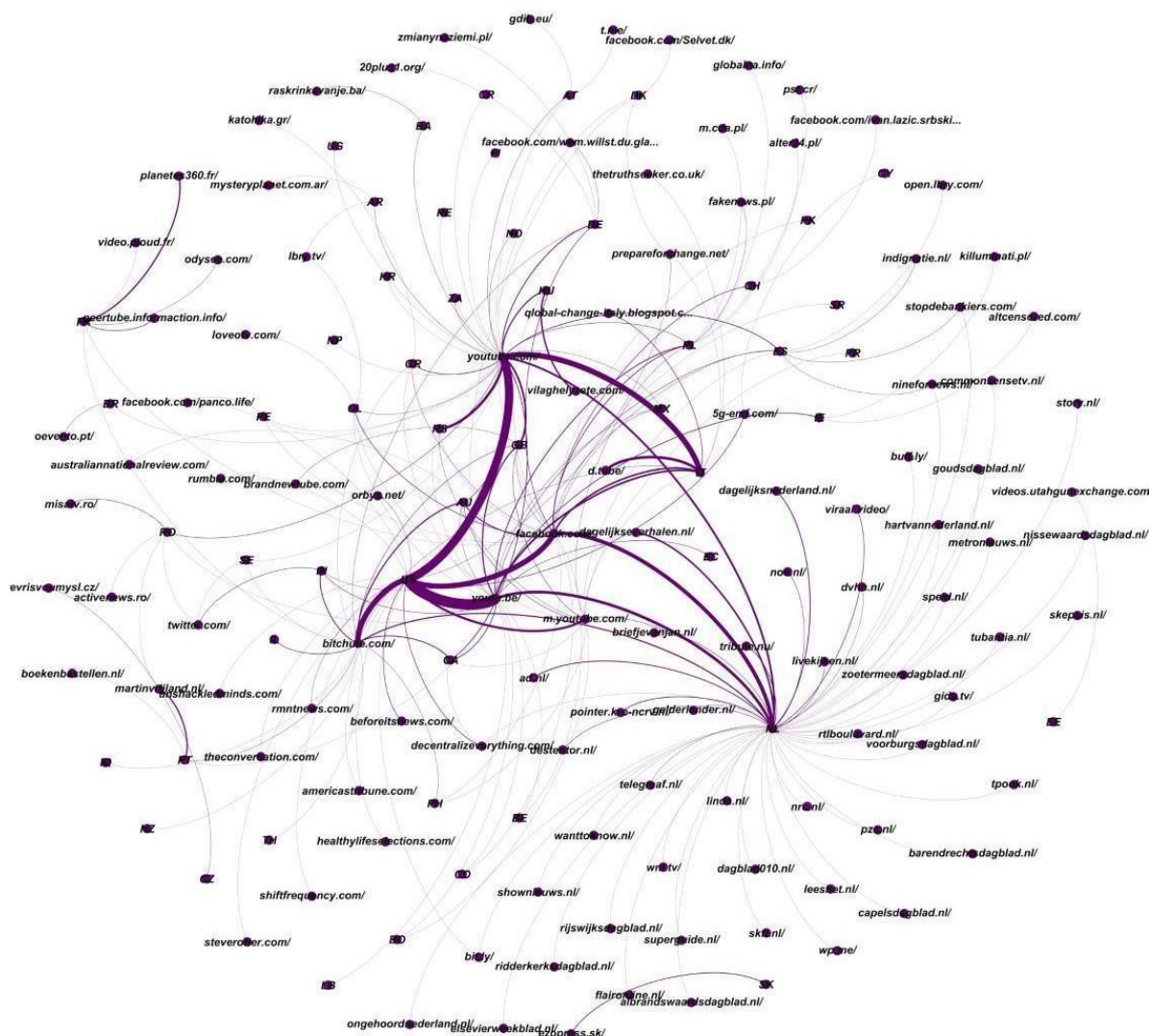


In the video, Ossebaard alleges that Bill Gates is a sinister force behind the current crisis, that COVID-19 is nothing more than the flu, and that nurses inject microchips along with the vaccine to give the elite control over citizens. Ossebaard alleges the virus was deliberately made in a laboratory in Wuhan and is a depopulation program masterminded by Bill Gates. She claims that former US president Donald Trump, backed by Q, has a plan to counter the program. Ossebaard's material is still circulated in Facebook groups, such as in the group "Together we are stronger"^{cxvii} (4.5K followers) where it has 3.7K views. Bitchute is cited as a platform where content by certain actors, remains available, for example Revrouwlutie^{cxviii} (3.9K followers) and the page Transformationsportalen (51 likes, 232 comments, 44 shares)^{cxix}. On Bitchute itself, Ossebaard's video^{cxl} has more than 584.5K views. In another interview^{cxli} on RT Dutch, Ossebaard wears a Q t-shirt, and states that COVID-19 is a "lie" and that the government, World Health Organization, Dutch health agencies and others are all governed by Bill Gates.

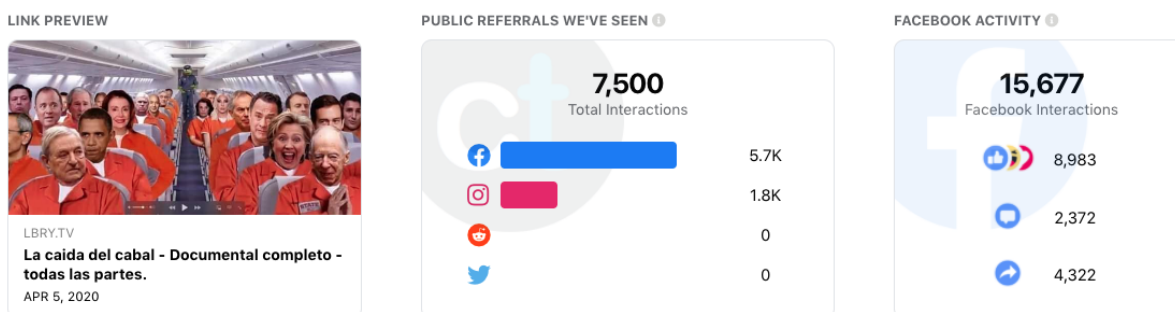
Using Ossebaard as an example, we conducted a Network analysis using CrowdTangle and Gephi and visualized her "mentions" on Facebook across the world. Notably, the analysis shows that the Netherlands are the second-biggest node, coming only after the United States.



In fact, Dutch QAnon content has far-reaching influence outside the Netherlands. Ossebaard's documentary ValCabal (Fall of the Cabal) was shared more than 6K times and seen more than 250K times on one page in the United States alone^{xlii}. An analysis of the sharing behavior using CrowdTangle's search function and network analysis with Gephi shows heavy sharing between US and Dutch networks.



A Spanish version of the documentary in active circulation on Facebook has been shared over 4,322 times.

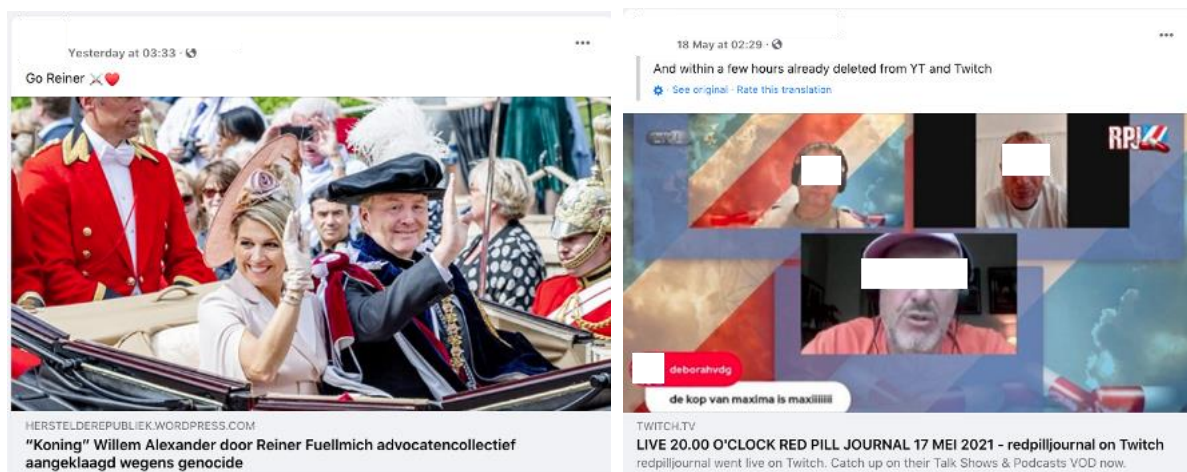


We continue to spot this documentary shared in part and/or with a changed name and title across Facebook. One example is the Take the Red Pill^{exliii} page, a self-declared “education site” which regularly shares QAnon content to its more than 200K members. These post were

flagged to Facebook under diverse category of False News, and dangerous organization, yet the continue to be circulated online.



We continue to find Dutch-language groups and posts that spread QAnon related content on Facebook despite their policy against QAnon conspiracies and COVID-19 disinformation. These posts were flagged to Facebook.



News Websites and Wider Networks

The paragraphs above introduced key actors in the Dutch conspiracy ecosystem who interact with each other and produce content together. This content is then disseminated through a

wider network of QAnon-supportive groups and actors with access to several social media platforms.

For example, Jensen's content is shared in different Facebook groups that we researched, including private group: "Nee tegen de Corona Maatregelen (Privé)"^{exliv} (48.5K members) and local pages like: Frisians in Revolt^{exlv} (23.4K followers).



A key node in this network is the Facebook page Cafe Weltschmerz^{exlvi}, which has 108K subscribers on YouTube and 16.9K on Facebook. Cafe Weltschmerz is also funded by the same foundation (SMWB) which donated to FvD and created Climategate.nl (see chapter 2). Cafe Weltschmerz's posts also endorse QAnon and QAnon-related conspiracy theories. One YouTube video^{exlvii} shared on the Facebook page (seen 37.1K times, 98 likes, 37 shares) is headed, "Vaccination, this is how you do it. Governments see their chance to gain more control over their citizens." Cafe Weltschmerz is regularly fact-checked and moderated by Facebook, whereupon founder Max von Kreyfelt promoted the use of alternative terms such as "c-vaccinations" and "corina" to avoid automatic content flagging and announced he would move to Telegram and Bitchute.

In addition to public and private Facebook pages and groups, outposts of this conspiracy network also have been listed as news-sites on Facebook. Pages such as 9fornews^{exlviii}, RT Dutch^{exlix}, Ongehoord Nederland^{cl} and Onafhankelijk Pers Nederland^{cli}, OnrechtTV^{clii}, LNN^{cliii} and De Andere Krant^{cliv} regularly post content which is either borderline content, COVID-19 disinformation or outright conspiracy. For example, De Andere Krant, which was founded in 2018, has 16K followers on Facebook and also shares the content produced by the figures mentioned above. Hulleman donates^{clv} to the newspaper. RT Dutch^{clvi}, a news page with nearly 40K followers that regularly shares QAnon-related ideas and disinformation, has also circulated content featuring Ossebaard, Hulleman and others. One such video has been

viewed more than 10K times on Facebook and 32.6K times on YouTube^{clvii}. Another broadcaster, Ongehoord Nederland^{clviii}, which recently gained enough members in the Netherlands for a broadcast license^{clix}, also gave a platform to Ossebaard. YouTube later removed the video. Another Facebook news page, Onafhankelijk Pers Nederland (Independent Press Netherlands)^{clx}, regularly expresses support for the QAnon movement, for example through their collaboration^{clxi} with Dutch QAnon supporter, van Zeeland. News pages on Facebook such as OnrechtTV^{clxii} and LNN^{clxiii} (an alternative news site with 16K followers made possible by the website Telegramnl.eu^{clxiv}, a right wing network) also share Jensen's content.

Given that YouTube at least is increasingly moderating and removing the content of Dutch QAnon-affiliated actors, the figures mentioned above have started shifting to alternate platforms such as Blckbx, Telegram, BitChute and Lbrty.tv. This does not mean that content does not feature on Facebook. For instance, Engel's Viruswaarheid and other pages on Facebook regularly share content from BitChute^{clxv}, YouTube^{clxvi} and Café Weltschmerz^{clxvii} and thereby replicate content from other QAnon-affiliates.

We manually identified 50 pages and groups along with associated Telegram and YouTube channels, and/or websites in which content is cross-posted. The list of these 50 pages and groups can be viewed in [Annex 2](#).

Despite Facebook's clear policy against Qanon content, these pages and groups regularly flout QAnon symbols, and organize and participate in protests and demonstrations^{clxviii} in which they hold QAnon-style banners. Members of the Facebook groups we traced organized and participated in sometimes violent anti-lockdown protests across the Netherlands, and have threatened officials such as Van Dissel^{clxix}, the director of the Centrum Infectieziektebestrijding (CIb) with violence.

Chapter 5

5. The post does not violate community standards

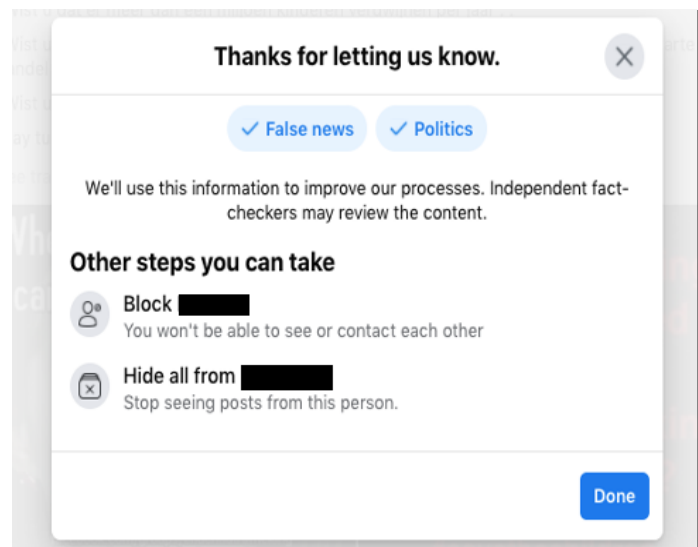
In Facebook's own words^{clxx}: "Community Standards are written to ensure that everyone's voice is valued, and Facebook takes great care to craft policies that are inclusive of different views and beliefs- those of people and communities that might otherwise be overlooked or marginalized."

Flagging is primarily community-led, with users flagging posts as violating the Facebook Community policy. Facebook users can report posts via an automated system under categories which often overlap and are mostly fragmented without proper definition or a complete system of reporting. For example, Facebook has classified the Qanon movement as a 'dangerous organization' stating clearly in August 2020 that they will be removing Qanon content even when there is no violence. However, Facebook does not allow Qanon related content to be flagged by Facebook users. Facebook flagging category of 'graphic violence' is the only category where a 'dangerous organization' can be flagged. This inherent flaw in reporting structure seriously impedes the flagging process.



For example, the post on the left from 3rd August 2020 contains a QAnon conspiracy theory (Pizzagate), COVID-19 disinformation, shocking content and graphic violence.

When our team tried to flag it under False Information, we were only able to flag it to an



automated system, which told us to either block the user who posted them or hide their posts. The automated system provides a standardized formula that "Independent fact-checkers may review the content".


We reported this post as "False News – Politics", as the post contains images and memes that are political in nature and also contain health-related disinformation. However, posts that

contain disinformation or misinformation and that can be flagged as "False Information" are only communicated to Facebook's AI-led moderation process, and not to a human moderator.

On 17th May 2021, following a four-step process, we reported this post once again as Violence ---> Graphic violence ---> Yes, I would like to continue filing this report [dangerous person or organization & Another Graphic violence] ---> Next ---> Done.

<p>Please select a problem</p> <p>If someone is in immediate danger, get help before reporting to Facebook. Don't wait.</p> <p>Nudity Violence Harassment</p> <p>Suicide or self-injury False information Spam</p> <p>Unauthorised sales Hate speech Terrorism</p> <p>Something else</p> <p>What kind of violence?</p> <p>Graphic violence Death or severe injury Violent threat</p> <p>Animal abuse Something else</p> <p>Other steps you can take</p> <p> Block [redacted] You won't be able to see or contact each other</p> <p> Hide all from [redacted] Stop seeing posts from this person.</p>	<p>Report post</p> <p>Before you report, does the post go against our Community Standards on violence?</p> <p>We only remove content that goes against our Community Standards. We don't allow things such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A credible threat to commit violence For example, targeting a person and mentioning a specific weapon• A dangerous person or organisation For example, terrorism or a criminal organisation• Extreme graphic violence For example, glorifying violence or celebrating suffering• Another kind of violence For example, disturbing images or something else <p>I don't know. I'd like to see other steps I can take. <input type="radio"/></p> <p>Yes, I'd like to continue filing this report. <input checked="" type="radio"/></p> <p>Next</p>
<p>Thank you, we've received your report</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Violence <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Graphic violence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Report received Your report helps us to improve our processes and keeps Facebook safe for everyone.• In review We use technology and review teams to remove anything that doesn't follow our standards as quickly as possible.• Decision made We'll notify you about the outcome in your Support Inbox as soon as possible. <p>Next</p>	<p>What you can do while you wait</p> <p> Block [redacted] You won't be able to see or contact each other</p> <p> Hide all from [redacted] Stop seeing posts from this person.</p> <p> Submitted to Facebook for review You have submitted a report</p> <p>Undo</p> <p>Done</p>

Facebook responded within 2 hours to our flagging of the above post as "Graphic violence" and stated that it does not breach their community standards.



Info needed · Today at 20:20

Thanks for your feedback

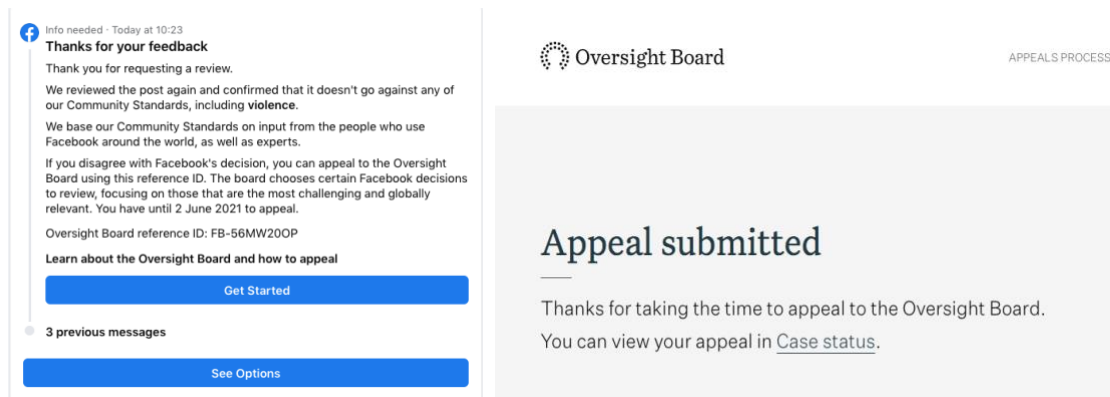
Thanks for taking the time to report something that you feel may breach our Community Standards. Reports such as yours are an important part of making Facebook a safe and welcoming environment. The post you reported was reviewed and it doesn't breach our **Community Standards**.

Please let us know if you see anything else that concerns you. We want to keep Facebook safe and welcoming for everyone.

1 previous message

See Options

After we requested a review, we were given the following response: “We reviewed the post again and confirmed that it doesn’t go against **any** of our Community Standards, including violence” [emphasis ours]. We received this response within 24 hours. We again appealed the decision, with a hope that it may be reviewed by the Facebook Oversight Board.



Between 1st February 2021 and 20th March 2021, our team dedicatedly reported 938 posts to Facebook, which we believe were in violation of Facebook’s community standards. Together, these 938 posts generated 176,635 interactions [calculated manually at the time of reporting by summing up emoticons, comments and shares]. Despite flagging 938 posts to Facebook over a period of 7 weeks, only 12 of our flagged posts were deleted. Of the posts which were deleted, 7 were categorized as hate speech (total reported 144) and 5 as violence (total reported 16).

Due to a massive amount of COVID-19 related disinformation, most of our flagging was in the category of False News.

Despite Facebook’s policy on COVID-19 disinformation, coordinated harmful behaviour and QAnon conspiracies, there is no single way to report such violations to the platform. As we have shown, in part because of a lack of clarity regarding Facebook’s own terminology, posts can be reported under several categories. Starting in March 2021, Facebook introduced a layer of nuance, and we were able to select more specifically whether “false news” pertained to politics, health or society. For each post that we flagged, we also identified the text, content, type of post, provided a Facebook moderation categorization, and added our own moderation categorization. Because of Facebook’s often fragmented criteria and due to lack of suitable categories under which a post can be reported to Facebook, we decided to base our analysis as best as possible on the community standards for this moderation process alongside our own moderation categorization. Among the posts we reported, the most interactions were generated by posts that shared text combined with a picture (poster). This was followed by video posts with texts in the body.

Categorization of content flagged to facebook

No. and type of post reported with the amount of interaction generated*

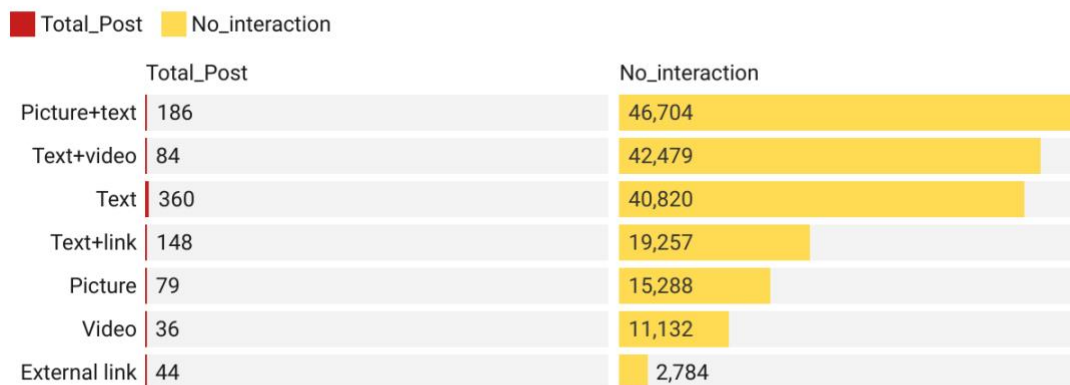


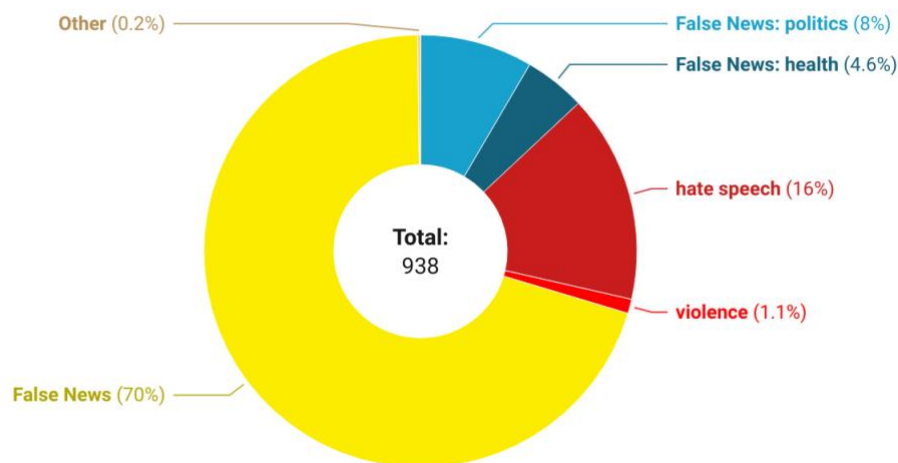
Chart: *Interactions are manually calculated by adding only the number of reactions and shares on the reported posts. The data does not include the number of comments on each posts or reactions on those comments. • Source: Foundation the London Story • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 11 – Interaction levels according to media type of reported post

We reported 938 posts originating from 56 Facebook groups, 60 Facebook pages and four individual profiles.

Categorization of the flagged content

Labels under which posts were reported



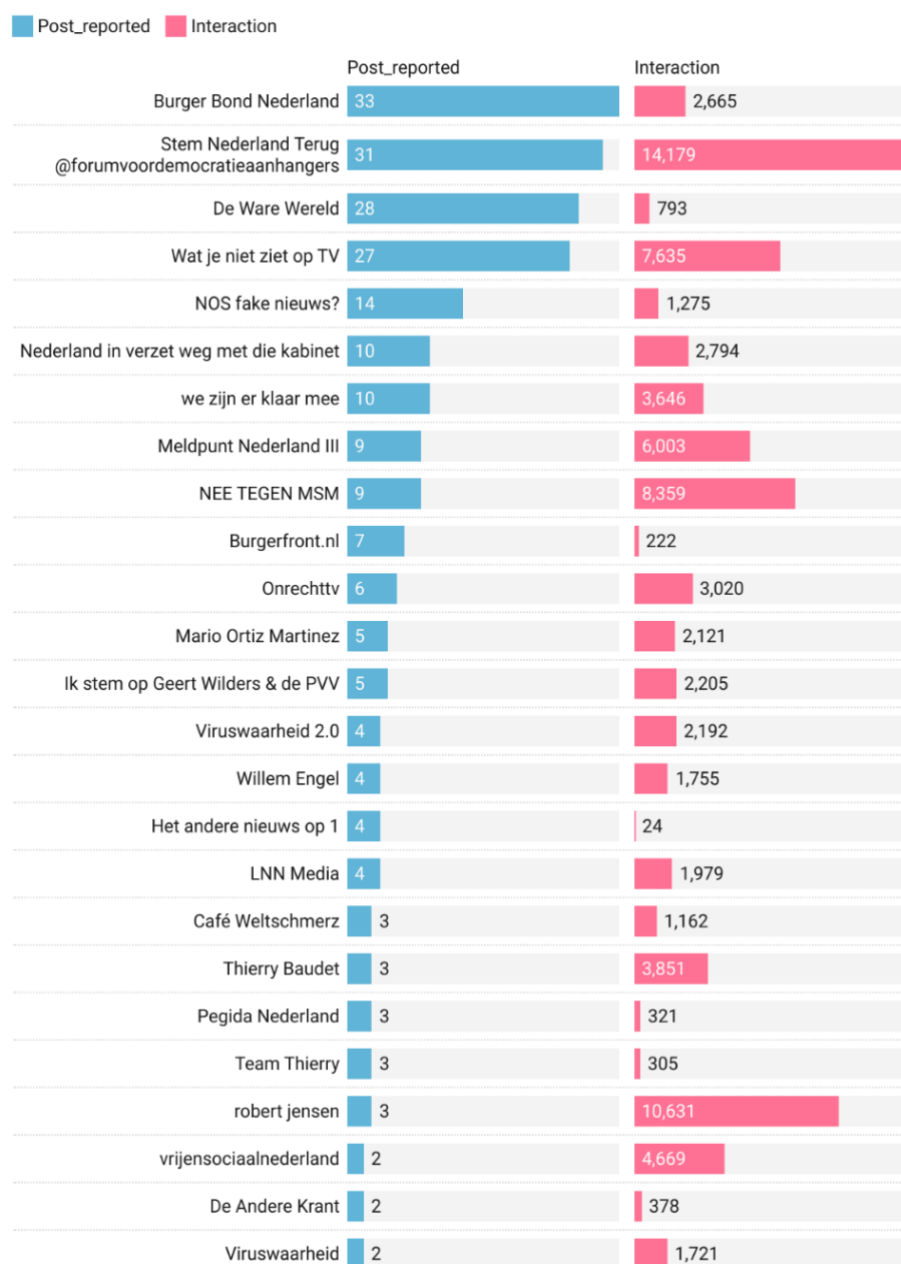
Source: Foundation the London Story • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 12 - Labeling of the content flagged by our team

The figure below lists 25 pages that we believe repeatedly violated Facebook's community standards. All of these groups continue to be active on Facebook.

Top 25 pages

Post on these pages were reported multiple times for violation



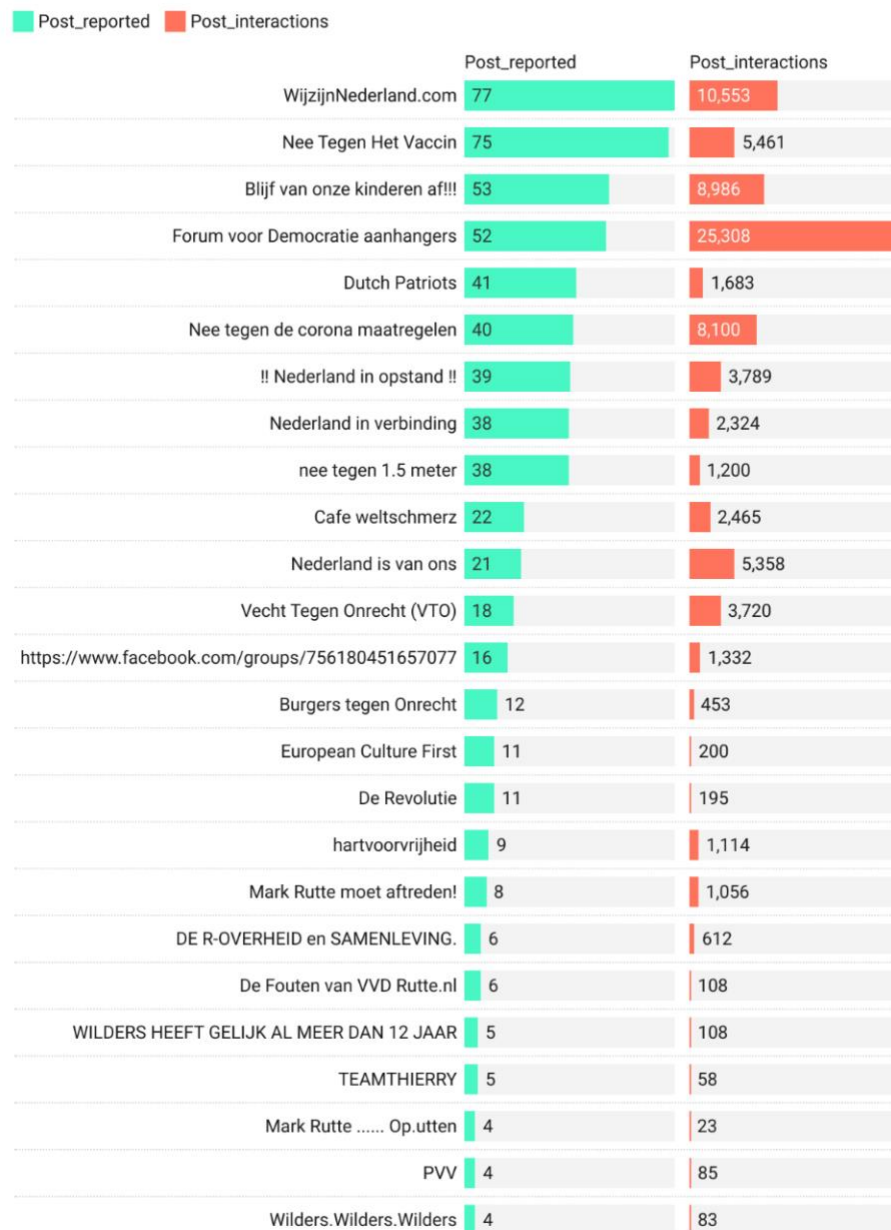
Created with Datawrapper

Figure 13 – Top 25 pages reported for post violations

The figure below lists 25 groups that we believe repeatedly violated Facebook's community standards. Of these, only one Facebook group (shown as a URL in the image below) has been permanently removed by Facebook.

Top 25 Groups

Groups where multiple posts were reported for violation



Created with Datawrapper


Figure 14 – Top 25 groups reported for violations

Towards the run-up of the Dutch election, we extensively analyzed Facebook's community and ad standards and found over 93 categories about which Facebook has made moderation

rules. A deeper analysis revealed that the standards, especially ad standards, are not rooted in principles of law or regulation, but are standards set to allow functioning of an incompetent and biased Artificial Intelligence^{clxxi}. We strongly believe that Facebook’s community-led flagging process is flawed 1) because it puts the onus of managing disinformation on the wider community which is regularly bombarded with disinformation and 2) the policy itself remains to be structurally flawed. For example, in Facebook’s Ad Policy Section 4.12^{clxxii} regarding prohibited content relating to “personal attributes”, one of the examples given is that ads cannot directly ask if a person is a convicted criminal but can offer “services to ‘clean up’ any previous offences.” We found this example particularly interesting as in most countries around the world “cleaning up any previous offences” might itself be a punishable offence under the criminal law jurisprudence and can be actively constituted as an “abatement to crime”, “hindrance with process of justice” or “hiding of evidence”.

Criminal record

Examples

- | | |
|--|---|
|  "Services to clean up any previous offences" |  "Are you a convicted criminal?" |
|--|---|

“Good-Samaritan” community users across the world report misinformation, disinformation and hate speech to Facebook out of their social good-will, but at no point does Facebook state that it uses their reporting to train their AI. In the process, Facebook not only puts a heavy mental burden upon its hired and community-led moderators, but also erodes social cohesion in the world.

Throughout this report, we have shown that Facebook is amplifying content that is eroding the Netherlands’ vibrant democracy and social cohesion by creating facades of disinformation run rife. Facebook regularly falls short in monitoring content, even when such content has been flagged and debunked by Facebook’s own fact-checkers. By continuing to fail in moderating non-English content, Facebook is complicit in raising populist sentiments, increasing social polarization and encouraging disinformation about essential healthcare.

Chapter 6

6. Recommendations

Transparency and audits: It is well recognized that social media algorithms are black boxes. We repeat the recommendation already made to Facebook by Avaaz, Disinfo.EU and the parliaments of the US, UK and Europe:

- Researchers within the strong bounds of GDPR-compliant governments must have access to the tools necessary to understand the cumulative impact of how social media platforms work.
- Platforms must be required to provide comprehensive reports on disinformation, measures taken against it, the design, operation, and impact of the algorithms used.
- Platforms' algorithms must be continually and independently audited by independent researchers to measure impact and to improve design, operation and outcomes.
- Users should have complete transparency on what sort of information is collected about them and for what purpose.
- Users should have the right to be forgotten and data erasure as per the GDPR principles.

Detox the algorithm: Algorithmic oppression through the promotion of majoritarian content, ideas and beliefs are becoming increasingly recognized. It is necessary that Facebook through self-regulation, and governments through necessary checks and balances, act to reduce the amplification and reach of harmful content and disinformation.

- Facebook should embed the right to information not just in its transparency policy but also in proactively working towards providing credible information and cutting out misinformation.
- Governments should take the steps necessary to establish soft measures, like a political ethics code, that parties and candidates must abide by.
- **Measures should also be put in place for maintaining election integrity by capping how much political parties can spend on ads.**

Design changes to slow down sharing of false information: Facebook should keep testing and improving on design and systemic changes to the platform that will slow down the spread of disinformation. The work of independent fact-checkers should further be incorporated into the design changes. E.g. When a piece of content constitutes disinformation (as verified by an independent third-party fact-checker), platforms which accept the breach should show label or show corrections to every user who viewed, interacted with, or shared the content.

- Authorized fact-checkers should be allowed to determine if the content should remain on the platform, be demoted, or be removed. A common matrix can be developed towards misinformation and hateful content following the UN definition of Hate Speech: Context + Speaker + Timing + Perception parameters.
- Non-English languages should be treated on a par with English.

Social media self-regulation: We stand by people's right to free speech. We also recognize that like every other fundamental, constitutional and human right, the right to free speech is tenable against governments, not private companies. We stand by the position of David Kaye,

the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, that platforms must enshrine self-regulatory boundaries in a code, rather than seeking to be the arbitrator of truth. Such self-regulation should yield systematic and certain outcomes in a transparent manner. Where it fails or is absent should be monitored by independent regulatory bodies in government. To improve transparency and efficiency, we also advise that Facebook adopt a strict timeline for its actions. Failure to do so should trigger independent regulators in government to step in and actively monitor the platform's performance.

Actor Specific Recommendation

For Facebook:

We recommend that Facebook move beyond the baseline of the corporate commitments to human rights^{clxxiii}. Rather than relying on “ethical AI”^{clxxiv} and a generalized sense of fairness, it should embed its models in universal human rights standards and sustainable development goals.

If Facebook wants to truly represent itself as a “community,” it should take moral grounding and critical legal responsibility to ensure that its platforms channel life-saving information instead of spreading life-threatening noise, be it regarding health, society or otherwise. This means a stronger commitment to basic rights such as the Right to Health, the Right to Information, the Right to Life and the Right to Dignity, which should not only be exhibited through their Corporate Social Responsibility reports, but through proactive measures towards combating noise, bullying, disinformation, misinformation and hate speech on its platforms. Facebook's Community and Ad policies currently make no mention of commitments to basic human rights.

We strongly recommend Facebook invest in technologies which are inclusive and recognize the intersectionality of human experience. As an auxiliary finding we were dismayed to find that female Dutch politicians have only a 1% share of the total voice on the platform. This is because “voice” on Facebook is amplified differently, and the automated adjustment needs to be corrected to accommodate for bias. Facebook must commit to ensuring that minority voices are not drowned and further marginalized.

We urge Facebook to pay attention to reports such as this one and address the content we have flagged or remove it if it does not meet its own state terms of service. If Facebook is genuinely interested in making its “community safe for all,” then content flagged in research made by identifiable civil society actors, academics, and independent non-partisan organizations should be taken seriously.

We strongly recommend Facebook align its policies, including those on transparency and accountability, with the basic tenets of procedural, evidentiary, and administrative law, while remaining open to challenges and modifications. This would mean investing in Law and Policy teams whose responsibility is not to defend Facebook in litigation, but rather to create sound and coherent rules.

For the Dutch Government:

Our key recommendation to the Dutch Government is to strengthen scientific communication as well as communication around civic responsibility. We are aware that the Netherlands has already taken measures by instituting funds and commitments towards both these goals.

These are welcome steps. In addition, the recent Child Benefit Scandal has revealed the Dutch bureaucracy's apathy towards the country's citizens. We propose the Dutch government take action to counter this from recurring.

We recommend that the Netherlands proactively adopt a Digital Services Act while the European Union's proposal for legislation remains in the pipeline. The act would ensure that platforms used by Dutch citizens, irrespective of the geography of the service provider, would have appropriate checks in place to filter out misinformation and disinformation. In effect, platforms would have to build consistent mechanisms for self-regulation of content or face penalties where they failed to set standards in a timely manner or arbitrarily deviated from them. It may also include reliance on the principles of Universal Jurisdiction to protect the fundamental rights of the Dutch citizens across the world, including the right to correct information.

Finally, tackling digital spaces in a future-oriented way means looking beyond national boundaries and notional ideas of company registration. European nations should build on the foundation laid by GDPR, to collectively ensure that digital spaces are inclusive and, regardless of location, conform to universal human rights.

For Civil Society:

Walk out and stage a boycott. We invite organizations who buy Facebook Ads to participate in a Facebook Ad Boycott action.

Afterword:

Social media has phenomenally changed the way we as human society interact, exciting opportunities to forge meaningful connections across the world is certainly a positive aspect of this technologies. However, the pitfalls in terms disinformation, misinformation and hate-speech are also steep, which requires innovative thinking and re-adjustments and re-calibration of our systems of laws and social governance to include governance of online spaces. This would effectively mean that if Facebook is a community square, the rules of decency, morality, good-neighborliness and the duty of care (the concepts upon which our modern legal systems are based on) must apply to the actors within this square. The managers and overseers of these squares should build transparent and effective set of rules that produce outcomes which are systematic and reliable. Failure to abide by the rules of the 'square' and the failure to systematically fail in applying the rules as they are, should result in declaring Facebook a rather 'rogue state'.

And while we understand that private organizations do not particularly have a responsibility towards creating norms, rules or laws, or a responsibility towards enforcing Human rights, we also recognize that our physical space of being and belonging is disrupted, we as society exist between online and offline, between governments and corporates, between knowledge and information overload, and the new problems of this futuristic world needs futuristic solutions.

End Notes

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