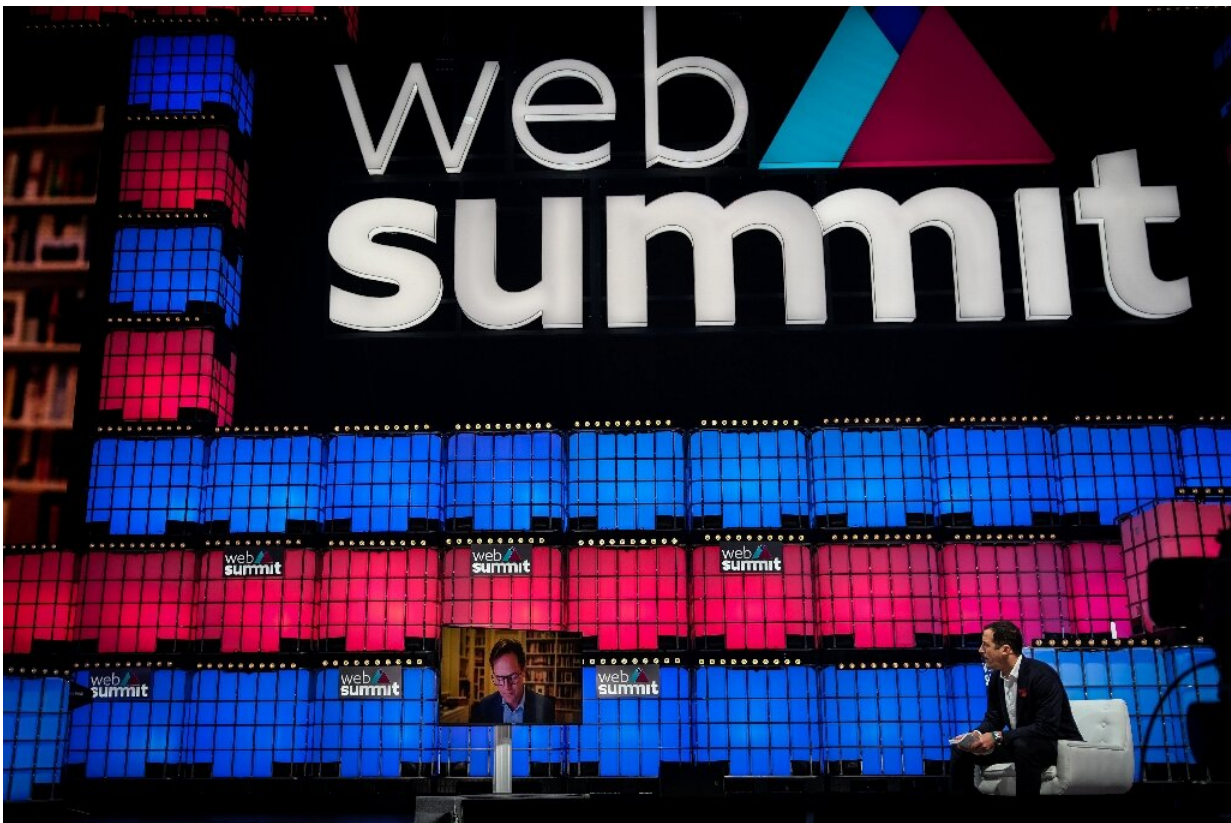


Facebook on defensive over work in 'fragile' countries

November 2 2021, by Katy Lee



Clegg told the Web Summit in Lisbon that 'legitimate questions' had been raised about Facebook's work in 'fragile' countries.

Facebook's vice president Nick Clegg hit back Monday at criticism that the tech giant's efforts to combat misinformation are woefully

inadequate outside the West, though he acknowledged: "We need to do more."

The "Facebook Papers", a massive trove of leaked internal documents, have cast a light on the company's struggles to stop false information and hate speech from spreading in emerging economies, notably India.

Some 87 percent of Facebook's anti-misinformation budget is focused on the United States even though the vast majority of its users are elsewhere, the papers revealed.

Addressing the Web Summit tech conference in Lisbon via video-link, Clegg—Britain's former deputy prime minister—said "legitimate questions" had been raised about Facebook's work in "fragile" countries.

But he insisted the company has poured "significant resources" into improving the situation.

"We now have content moderation in over 70 countries, and we're adding them all the time," he said, adding that moderators in 12 new languages including Haitian Creole had been hired this year.

"We obviously learned some pretty searing lessons from what happened in Myanmar," he added, referring to widespread use of Facebook to whip up ethnic violence in the country.

'Break glass' options

Clegg insisted "big changes" had been made to Facebook's policies since 2014, with more resources allocated to countries judged "at risk" in terms of the human rights situation.

So-called "break glass" options, allowing Facebook to "very

dramatically" reduce the distribution of information, have been used recently in Bangladesh and Afghanistan, he added.



Whistleblower Frances Haugen has accused Facebook of inflicting huge damage in countries that feel remote from its Silicon Valley headquarters.

Frances Haugen, the former Facebook engineer who leaked the documents, has accused the company of inflicting huge damage in countries that feel remote from its Silicon Valley headquarters.

For years the social network's algorithms made "polarising and divisive content" more visible in people's timelines, she told the Web Summit on Monday.

"In places like the United States that might cause ruined Thanksgiving dinners," she said, but she added that "in more fragile places around the world" the consequences can be deadly.

She cited Ethiopia as an example of a country where violence had been "amplified by social media".

Facebook has long struggled to tamp down hate speech there due to the dozens of different dialects spoken among Ethiopians, she pointed out.

Clegg insisted Facebook's moderation efforts in Ethiopia are "far better" today than they were a couple of years ago.

"We have the capacity to review content in a number of the most widely-used languages," he added, including Amharic, Tigrinya and Somali.

Clegg also defended the timing of Facebook's "Meta" rebrand, after critics derided it as an attempted distraction from recent negative headlines.

The renaming of Facebook's parent company last week is intended to signal a shift in focus towards developing the "metaverse", a virtual reality internet that would make online experiences feel face-to-face.

Clegg said Facebook had been planning the rebrand for months and has spent billions of dollars over "a very long period of time" on developing technology that could one day be used for the metaverse.

"We thought it was the right time to come clean about what the focus is at the company," he said.

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