

LEGAL BLOG

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THE METAVERSE: WILL IT BE A BETTER-VERSE FOR CLIMATE CHANGE AWARENESS?

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If you started off your knowledge of the Metaverse by calling it an “adult version of the SIMS”, then don’t worry, you’re in good company¹. The Metaverse—the “next evolution”² of Facebook— is essentially where our digital world meets our real lives.³ Like you created your Mii back when Wii’s were a thing—for the Metaverse, you create your own digital avatar, can interact with others, travel, play games, and otherwise partake in the so-called industrial revolution of the Metaverse.

According to Mark Zuckerberg, the “metaverse will let you socialize, learn, collaborate and play in ways that go beyond what we can imagine.”⁴ But what effect will the Metaverse have on what Meta itself describes as the “greatest threat we all face”⁵—climate change?

Facebook, and now Meta, are in the social media and information sharing business. They are designed as a platform for people to communicate from all across the world and control who can see what, when and where.⁶ In this, they wield a huge amount of influence. With the launch of the Metaverse, this influence on people will likely only increase, as research from the Stanford Virtual Human Interaction Lab has shown that using virtual reality can change how human behavior works.⁷ Unfortunately, despite Facebook acknowledging that it has a “responsibility to tackle climate misinformation on our services”⁸, a report done on Facebook’s U.S. advertising for the first half of 2020 found that only 1-of-51 climate disinformation ads identified were actually taken down by

¹ ...including with the authors of this article

² <https://about.facebook.com/meta/>

³ <https://www.greenmatters.com/p/metaverse-environmental-impact>

⁴ <https://about.facebook.com/meta/>

⁵ <https://about.fb.com/news/2021/11/our-commitment-to-combating-climate-change/>

⁶ <https://www.ibanet.org/Facebook-Meta-and-the-power-of-tech>

⁷ French, K., (2021, August 20). *Can virtual reality save the planet?* State of the Planet. Retrieved April 5, 2022, from <https://news.climate.columbia.edu/2021/08/18/can-virtual-reality-save-the-planet/>

⁸ <https://about.fb.com/news/2021/11/our-commitment-to-combating-climate-change/>



Facebook—they gained eight million impressions over those six months.⁹ Then, when a watchdog group investigated Facebook in 2021, they found that between April to November of that year, Facebook “ran 136 posts from organizations with ties to the fossil fuel industry, including rightwing blogs PragerU and Turning Point USA, accumulating more than 61 million estimated views.”¹⁰ The vast majority of these posts failed to be flagged by Facebook’s fact checkers as false or misleading to users.

On the flipside of limiting climate propaganda, Facebook faces court action for the climate change posts it has fact checked when, earlier this year, former Fox Business News host John Stossel sued the company in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California for fact-checking his global warming videos. He claims that Facebook defamed him and harmed him financially, “including in the form of reduced distribution of his reporting, reduced viewership, and reduced profits from advertising revenue from viewership”.¹¹

Does Meta have a duty of care to its users and how far does that duty extend in policing its content? While climate change may not exist in the Metaverse, that does not create a world where climate change does not exist. Facebook’s, and now Meta’s, power comes from the sharing of information (or misinformation) and, with a large part of the population’s increasing reliance on social media to get their news, this is where Meta can step up and make a difference with climate change concerns. In the meantime, Meta will likely be finding itself precariously balancing between defamation or first amendment lawsuits and its self-proclaimed duty to tackle misinformation—that is until the courts or the legislature determine the extent of a company’s duty of care is to its users. (For more information on pending litigation regarding such a duty of care, see [*“Okay Doomer”: Climate Change Litigation Led by Our Youth and Indigenous Peoples*](#)).

If you are a business with climate change litigation concerns or potential claims, Hahn Loeser & Parks LLP can help. Contact: Sarah Dunkley, sdunkley@hahnlaw.com or Kelsey Smith, klsmith@hahnlaw.com.

⁹ <https://influencemap.org/report/Climate-Change-and-Digital-Advertising-86222daed29c6f49ab2da76b0df15f76>

¹⁰ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidrvetter/2021/12/21/revealed-how-facebook-google-platformed-climate-lies-during-cop26-and-beyond/?sh=4d16600c10c5>

¹¹ <https://www.eenews.net/articles/former-tv-host-sues-facebook-over-climate-fact-checks/>

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