Facebook owes us an explanation

Yesterday, somewhere in the sixth hour of Facebook's record outage, I sat dumbfounded alongside my fellow editors at *The Verge.* We wondered how it was possible that the largest and most influential technology company in the world could have a day-long service disruption and basically say nothing about it except for a curt and cryptic tweet. Facebook eventually said that the outage was the result of a "server configuration change" — an impenetrable combination of words that translates to "we played ourselves." The company wasn't being attacked, so why not just come clean early?

The Verge, *The New York Times*, and others tried to get more information out of Facebook when following up for comment. After Facebook issued its statement today, we asked the company to explain more about the outage, including the real scope of the problem. How many countries did it affect? How many people were disrupted? Facebook ignored our questions, referring us to its generic statement and apology.

In light of Facebook's long list of wrongdoings, a temporary service outage might not seem like a big deal. It's even good material for jokes about Facebook. But what if we took Facebook seriously? What if, as an experiment, we charitably assumed all of the things Facebook says about itself are true? Here's a brief list of some of Facebook's beliefs about itself:

- Just last week, Facebook's chief global security officer told *Business Insider* that it "is the critical infrastructure for modern-day democracy."
- In his 2017 manifesto on Facebook as a "global

community," CEO Mark Zuckerberg said Facebook's infrastructure would be necessary to end terrorism, fight climate change, and prevent pandemics.

- In his latest manifesto, Zuckerberg implies that upcoming improvements to Facebook will enhance the privacy of citizens around the world, and keep dissidents alive.
- In his pre-IPO letter in 2012, Zuckerberg said "Facebook was not originally created to be a company. It was built to accomplish a social mission – to make the world more open and connected." He goes on to say "we don't build services to make money; we make money to build better services."

This is just a (very) small sample of the enormous set of beliefs that Facebook has built around itself over the past decade. And if we assume they're all true – that Facebook is indeed the *critical infrastructure for modern-day democracy* – how could it be appropriate for that critical infrastructure to go down for so long without offering any meaningful degree of transparency about what happened? Can a platform that makes the world more open and connected succeed in its mission if it is not itself open to the world that depends on it? No, of course not.

What's most alarming about Facebook's hushed tones on its record outage is that the company was once known for its legendary obsession with uptime. I'm sure Mark Zuckerberg is furious about the outage, and that his engineers are paying for it right now. But if Facebook can't even be honest and forthcoming with us on the most basic and urgent facts about its very existence, how can we trust it? How can anyone take it seriously?

https://www.theverge.com/2019/3/14/18266020/facebook-instagram-whatsapp-outage-statement-longest-server-configuration-change-mark-zuckerberg