Mark Zuckerberg says the internet needs a ‘more active role’ for regulators



In an op-ed for *The Washington Post* and *Independent.ie*, Facebook founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg says that he believes that there needs to be “a more active role for governments and regulators” in order to counter broader threats to society, while balancing freedom of expression. He outlines four broad areas where he feels that new regulation is needed: data portability, election integrity, harmful content, and privacy.

Zuckerberg uses the op-ed to lay out his case for each of the four areas, saying that “internet companies should be accountable for enforcing standards on harmful content,” and says that there needs to be “a more standardized approach” when it comes to taking down harmful content across a variety of services. He suggests that regulators could set standards for defining what constitutes harmful content, and the guidelines for removing it from online platforms.

Zuckerberg believes regulations are needed for data

portability, election integrity, harmful content, and privacy
For elections, he outlined the steps Facebook has taken to improve elections, such as new disclosure rules for political ads and searchable databases (although there have been some stumbles along the way) for such ads, but notes that there is a lot of grey area when it comes to determining what is an ad and what isn't (again, running into problems). He points out that existing laws that deal with political spending is often centered on the candidates themselves, rather than organizations that advocate for specific issues, and notes that laws need to be updated to address "the reality of the threads and set standards for the whole industry."

When it comes to privacy regulation, Zuckerberg comes out in favor of a comparable set of regulations like the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and says that "it would be good for the Internet if more countries adopted regulation such as GDPR as a common framework." He also says that such regulations should "protect your right to choose how your information is used," and should include ways to punish companies when mistakes are made. "

Finally, he notes that any such regulations should "guarantee the principle of data portability," and allow people to move their information from service to service, and that there should be a common standard that companies can use.

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Zuckerberg's op-ed comes after a bruising couple of years for the company, and is a rare call from regulation-adverse Silicon Valley. Moments like the Cambridge Analytica scandal in 2017 led to intense questions about the role that social media and the company play in society, and the influence it holds over its users. More recently, the terror attack in Christchurch, New Zealand renewed debate about the role that the internet plays in radicalizing bad actors, terror, and hate groups.

This recent op-ed is an evolution from Zuckerberg's comments almost exactly a year ago, when he told various outlets that he wasn't "sure we shouldn't be regulated" and felt that there was a role for regulators, provided it was the "right" regulation, and that he felt that "guidelines are much better than dictating specific processes." His op-ed calls for specific, standardized rules for internet companies to follow, and it seems that Facebook's experiences in that time has led to some soul searching about its role in society and connecting people around the world, as well as its own future, which Zuckerberg recently signaled could shift to focus on a more privacy-oriented platform that was more about private messaging and groups than public newsfeeds.

Calls for regulation are mounting

That soul searching has come alongside calls for more regulation for companies like Facebook, as well as outright calls for the company to be broken up, not only from outlets such as ourselves, but from presidential candidates as well, who argue that they exert too much influence on society. Congress has held numerous hearings about the matter, and while there have been plans and bill proposals for such a regulatory framework, not much has come through yet. Despite that, the pressure on Facebook is still mounting, and this latest op-ed seems to be a sign that Facebook is acknowledging that the world that it'll inhabit in the first 15 years of its life will be very different from the next 15.

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