

Controversies Surrounding Facebook

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Theme: [History](#)

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[Local Org](#)

Facebook is a problem. It is undoubtedly being used by special interests to manipulate and monitor entire populations both within the United States and well beyond. It represents a tool that in no way serves the people actually using it, and instead allows special interests to use the users. It is a dream global panopticon for the abusive dictators that run Western society and presume dominion over what they call an "international order."

But in order to counter this threat, Facebook cannot simply be "replaced." It specifically, and what it represents, must be disrupted entirely.

Facebook is a Skinner Box for Humans

Facebook has been at the center of several recent controversies that are increasingly leaving users disillusioned and in search of alternatives. At the center of these controversies is Facebook's "news feed" feature. Ideally, news feed would work by showing on your timeline updates from those individuals and organizations you follow. There are two options for news feed - "most recent" and "top stories." Facebook has decided to upend this feature by insidiously controlling what appears on your news feed regardless of which option you select.

Now, you will no longer receive regular updates from accounts you follow, and instead will see a "filtered" version determined by Facebook's algorithms. Many Facebook users are unaware of this fact and are perplexed as to why they are no longer receiving regular updates from accounts they follow.

[Facebook's own explanation](#) as to why they've implemented this policy is as follows:

Rather than showing people all possible content, News Feed is designed to show each person on Facebook the content that's most relevant to them. Of the 1,500+ stories a person might see whenever they log onto Facebook, News Feed displays approximately 300. To choose which stories to show, News Feed ranks each possible story (from more to less important) by looking at thousands of factors relative to each person.

Facebook's real motivation is more likely a combination [of implementing soft-censorship](#) and an effort to monetize news feeds by forcing content makers to pay in order to access people already following them. What's left is wealthy content makers like large corporate media outfits monopolizing the public's attention whether the public wants it or not.

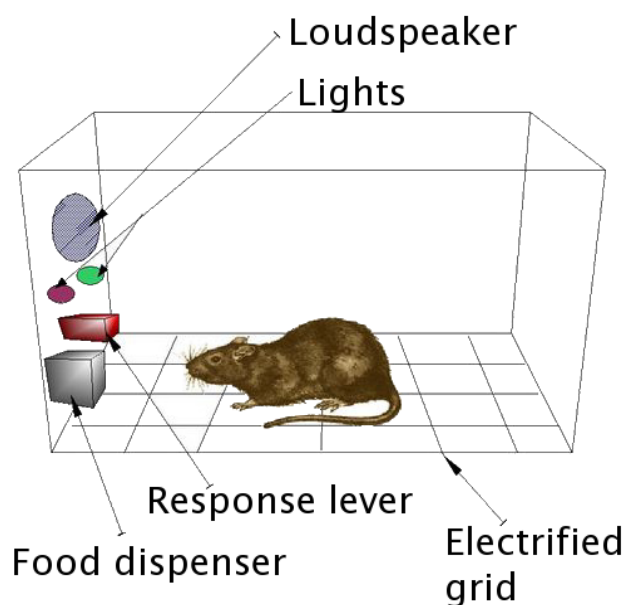
News feed has also been used in at least two involuntary social engineering experiments where the news feeds of users were manipulated without their knowledge to influence them

psychologically. In the most recently exposed experiment, [Facebook manipulated the news feed of some 2 million Americans in 2012](#) in order to increase public participation during that year's US presidential election.-

In 2013, Facebook would again manipulate news feeds of unwitting users to influence them psychologically. A report published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS) titled, "[Experimental evidence of massive-scale emotional contagion through social networks](#)," stated in its abstract that:

We show, via a massive ($N = 689,003$) experiment on Facebook, that emotional states can be transferred to others via emotional contagion, leading people to experience the same emotions without their awareness. We provide experimental evidence that emotional contagion occurs without direct interaction between people (exposure to a friend expressing an emotion is sufficient), and in the complete absence of nonverbal cues. Not only are the findings troubling – illustrating that Facebook possesses the ability to influence the emotions of its users unwittingly through careful manipulation of their news feeds – but the invasive, unethical methods by which Facebook conducted the experiment are troubling as well.

Those involved in the experiment were neither notified before nor after the experiment was conducted, and along with news feed manipulation during the 2012 election, it appears Facebook sees the news feed feature in terms of influencing people as Facebook and its clients see fit rather than the feature being used to inform users as they themselves see fit.



What Facebook is essentially is a massive, global, digital "Skinner box." Also known as a operant conditioning chamber, a Skinner box conditions a subject – usually an animal – to perform certain behaviors by controlling positive and negative stimuli regulated within the box. Pressing the correct lever would provide, for example, food pellets, while pressing the wrong lever would provide a painful electric shock.

Facebook, in this way, admits it regulated positive and negative stimuli in its 2013 experiment and in 2012 manipulated the behavior of subjects also through the use of specifically formulated stimuli. There is no telling what other experiments or ongoing manipulations Facebook users might be subjected to, and whether or not other IT

monopolies like Google are using similar means to influence, manipulate, and condition the behavior of users.

Disrupting Facebook

The first thing many Facebook users look for upon learning of this are alternatives. One in particular, [Ello, grabbed headlines recently as a “Facebook killer.”](#) Should Facebook’s 1 billion plus user base migrate over to Ello, would there be anything to stop special interests from simply co-opting and corrupting its basic premise of not manipulating users or invading their privacy? Most likely not.

Instead, efforts to disrupt Facebook and the centralized social networking premise it represents should be made. In other words, decentralizing social networking so that no single network controls the information, rules, and regulations that define social networking in general.



On a global scale this is already being done. Nations like Russia, China, Iran, and others have produced their own indigenous versions of Facebook – separate from not only Facebook’s monopoly, but the intrusive, abusive exploitation of that monopoly by corporate-financier interests on Wall Street and in the City of London. Russia’s [VK.com](#) for example, boasts 120 million users around the world and within Russia itself, is the most popular social networking site, by far eclipsing Facebook’s market share. While the Western media criticizes VK as a tool of the Kremlin, in light of recent scandals exposed in the West, the same could be said of Wall Street and London’s use of Facebook.

But decentralizing Facebook’s grip on social networking to a national scale isn’t enough. While many may find affinity toward the current political order in Russia, some day that may no longer be the case. Further decentralization – in fact – infinite decentralization should be the ultimate goal.

Forums, Websites, and RSS Analogies

Web forums are numerous and in many ways micro social networks in and of themselves. They are built around interests in entertainment, skills and hobbies, commerce, political ideology, religion, and many other personal interests. While one must become a member of these forums to participate, anyone can search the Internet and find threads containing useful information. It would be difficult to find the “Facebook” of Internet forums – because while there are very large and well-known forums – there is no monopoly.

Creating a new social networking paradigm based along a similar notion of infinite decentralization is not only possible, it is inevitable – just as soon as programmers and developers stop trying to create the next “Facebook” and begin contemplating instead the

next paradigm shift in social networking altogether – one that satisfies the growing desire to escape monopolized networks with proclivities toward invading the privacy of its users as well as manipulating and influencing them through insidious social engineering.

Imagine open source tools like Wiki or WordPress that allows anyone to create their own social network based around any specific interest or series of interests. Imagine tools like RSS feed that allows users from one social network to follow user updates on another social network without actually joining that network. Imagine being able to take your information and import it into a new social network if for whatever reason you decided you no longer like the rules, regulations, and practices of the network you were currently in – tools like WordPress' import options that allow Blogger users to migrate over along with all their previous Blogger content.



Image: What will come next? Another Facebook or something that will shift the paradigm of social networking entirely? Centralized networks are prone to abuse. Even networks like Ello that initially show promise hold the same weakness of over-centralization which will undoubtedly be targeted by special interests. A decentralized social networking paradigm with tools used to mesh networks together as users desire could represent just such a shift.

Facebook and undoubtedly VK and other large social networks have various groups of disenfranchised users who are unable to use these networks as they truly desire. Facebook has faced criticism for demanding users to use their real names to create profiles. Minority groups that prefer anonymity could create their own social network to cater specifically to their interests and agenda. They could follow popular feeds from other social networks, but preserve their own community created by, for, and of themselves.

In this way, instead of simply trying to replace Facebook with the next soon-to-be co-opted, corrupted, and overbearing social networking monopoly, the entire paradigm will be shifted in favor of what users actually want – privacy, the ability to control what content they receive, and to associate with whom they want, how they want. With hundreds if not thousands of these interconnected but ultimately independent networks cropping up, it will be impossible for monopolistic interests to co-opt, control, or censor them all, or even a majority of them.

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