

# **Facebook: Exploring the Social Network and its Challenges**



**Michael Nycyk**

**MICHAEL NYCYK**  
**FACEBOOK:**  
**EXPLORING THE**  
**SOCIAL NETWORK**  
**AND ITS**  
**CHALLENGES**

## **Facebook:**

### Exploring the Social Network and its Challenges

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## Acknowledgments

This is the fourth book in a series exploring Internet issues. The first was called Adult-to-Adult Cyberbullying: An Exploration of a Dark Side of the Internet, published in 2015, the second was called Trolls and Trolling: An Exploration of Those That Live Under The Internet Bridge, published in 2017, whilst the third was called Computer Hackers and Hacking: Exploring Those Lurking Behind the Screen, published in 2018. These are available for downloading at <https://cyberlibraryreferencebooks.wordpress.com/>

Facebook has become one of the world's most powerful social media platforms, having come a long way from its origins in Harvard University. While it has brought many benefits of connection and information sharing, it has experienced many challenging issues that have eroded the trust of those who use it. This book explores these issues functioning as a reference source that takes its place beside so much that has been written about the platform and its founder Mark Zuckerberg.

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**PLEASE BE AWARE THIS BOOK  
CONTAINS MATURE CONTENT  
WHICH SOME MAY FIND OFFENSIVE**

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

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. - Mark Zuckerberg<sup>1</sup>

If Facebook were a country, it would have the largest population on earth. More than 2.2 billion people, about a third of humanity, log in at least once a month. That user base has no precedent in the history of American enterprise. Fourteen years after it was founded, in Zuckerberg's dorm room, Facebook has as many adherents as Christianity. - Evan Osnos, *The New Yorker*<sup>2</sup>

Facebook has turned into (if it wasn't from the beginning) a humongous waste of time and productivity as all those legions of people are glued to their back-lit screens of all descriptions, typing madly, when they could and should be doing something productive - meaning having some value. - Bill Robertson, *Huffington Post*<sup>3</sup>

Since the invention of computer networks and their public availability, people have communicated and shared information with each other. From the early text-based electronic bulletin boards<sup>4</sup> to virtual communities, followed by interactive friend-making websites like Live Journal, Friends Reunited and Friendster, people were offered many ways to connect with each other. In 2002 MySpace<sup>5</sup> (<https://myspace.com/>) captured the world's imagination and was taken up by millions of Internet users. However, after 2004 Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/>) became the social media platform of choice for Internet users worldwide. Who would have contemplated not just the impact it would have on communication and information sharing, but the many controversies that occurred and their consequences?

This book explores Facebook's many and varied issues that this social media platform and its users experienced. First, social media is defined because Facebook will be referred to in this book as a social media platform. The term social media is difficult to adequately define (Singh, 2017; Obar & Wildman, 2015), but two general dictionary definitions explain the term as:

Cambridge Dictionary (2019):

Websites and computer programs that allow people to communicate and share information on the internet using a computer or mobile (cell) phone.

Merriam-Webster (2019):

Forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos).

Social media belongs to a range of Internet applications made possible to use by the invention of Web 2.0, where there is a focus on user collaboration, mass sharing of user-generated content and easier posting of photos and videos (Dictionary.com, 2019). Facebook's effect on

society though went beyond technological to being a cultural phenomenon. Its popularity meant people used this platform as a habit, turning to it first and stopped using previous social networking platforms. Yet from its beginnings, and as it grew quickly, though many positive uses of it were occurring it was overshadowed by many controversies. The appeal though lay in the multiple uses of it and millions of people (called users which will be frequently used in this book) joined over time.

There is a vast body of academic research and media reporting on many aspects of Facebook. Books have been written and films and documentaries produced. For many the platform has kept alive relationships and friendships when people move away, allowed sharing of opinions with a potentially global audiences, encouraged debate, been a space to obtain support on issues and share interests. The amount written about peoples' experiences with using it is vast, ranging from stories and experiences to large-scale statistical research. This book adds to this body of literature by examining a selection of Facebook issues as well as its history that, while not covering all issues, functions as an exploratory reference guide for readers.

This chapter's approach is to introduce Facebook from its more technical elements providing a background and context to this book's exploration. Internet research as a discipline is burgeoning, but is underpinned by constant technological change and human responses to it. As Baltar and Brunet (2011) argue, we cannot ignore the importance of virtual relationships and their interactions as greater reliance on social media and forthcoming technologies appear. We are more connected in this world as the Internet continues to penetrate remote geographic areas such as the Sahara and the Amazon previously inaccessible by it. Wandel and Beavers (2010, p. 96) describe the platform's function as:

Facebook enables easy and efficient communication of people from varying geographic, economic and social lives. In what other forum can you so conveniently converse to a large audience on matters from the meditative to the mundane? The communicative process not only stimulates self-discovery, it may also solidify citizenship over time.

This utopian view of it contrasts with its less favourable image. Trolling, incivility, rumours, gossip, doxing<sup>6</sup>, fake news, argueing and targeted advertising can potentially ruin a user's experience. Facebook takes much work to read, post and respond to content and may also present a false representation of other users being perpetually happy through the photographs and postings they share.

This chapter first defines and explains what Facebook, social media and social networking are. A general guide to joining Facebook and its security and other features, current as at 2020, is then presented. This demonstrates how it is used and gives an appreciation of its characteristics where the content of this book takes place. Finally, the six chapters, their topics and content, will be discussed to show how the book explores Facebook and the many positive and negative issues surrounding it.

## **Facebook, Social Media and Social Networking**

The Facebook platform is described as a social media and social networking service. Facebook, and those two terms to describe it, are defined in this section. These definitions serve to show the context were the issues that are discussed in this book occur.

**Facebook:**

WebWise.ie (2018) provide an effective and functional definition of Facebook as:

Facebook is a website which allows users, who sign-up for free profiles, to connect with friends, work colleagues or people they don't know, online. It allows users to share pictures, music, videos, and articles, as well as their own thoughts and opinions with however many people they like.

Users send "friend requests" to people who they may - or may not - know.

Once accepted, the two profiles are connected with both users able to see whatever the other person posts. "Facebookers" can post almost anything to their "timeline", a snapshot of what is happening in their social circle at any given time, and can also enter private chat with other friends who are online.

People with profiles list information about themselves. Whether it be what they work at, where they are studying, ages, or other personal details, many users post lots of information which is easily accessible to their friends and others. On top of this, users can "like" other pages which interest them. There, the user can post comments and receive club updates, pictures etc.

It is called a platform, meaning it is a place to host the content its users create and post to it. It is where the posted content resides and is the central idea of what Facebook is; a place to do these activities on the World Wide Web or Smart (Cell) phones.

**Social Media:**

The Cambridge Dictionary (2019) and Merriam-Webster (2019) dictionaries previously mentioned generalist definitions of social media that were technical. To relate the term to Facebook, a formal and informal definition drawn from three authors describes what the term means:

***Formal:***

Social media is defined as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technical foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61; Whiting & Williams, 2013).

***Informal:***

Social media is the media (content) that you upload - whether that's a blog, video, slideshow, podcast, newsletter or an eBook. Consider social media as a one-to-many communication method. Although people can respond and comment, you own the content and have to produce (write/record/create) the media yourself (Burke, 2013).

## **Social Networking:**

The idea of social networking in a Facebook setting is contextualised by the number of social relationships one has, as these are influences and moderating factors on audience behaviours (Cohen, Salazar & Barkat, 2009; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). This may mean the more friends you have on the platform the more you will use it. This may not be incorrect as you may have only ten Facebook friends and interact only with those people, but regardless you are still considered to be social networking. A formal definition by social media scholars boyd and Ellison of it is (boyd & Ellison, 2007):

We define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site.

Social networking is characterised either as internal, usually who you friend on Facebook, and external, a Facebook page or group you may join. The website More-For-Small-Business.com (2018) describes these types of networks as:

An internal social network where people are invited 'in' to the group (Facebook), or invited to link (LinkedIn) or follow (Twitter). Internal networks are usually a community of people with interests in common.

An external social network is 'open to the public' and is an online place where people go to visit, exchange and connect about an interest (such as sports, gardening, cooking, health networks, and more).

Facebook is considered a social network, but the user controls the types of networks they join.

## **Structure and Features of Facebook**

In this section the structure and features of Facebook are discussed to give an overview on joining and using it. This serves to illustrate where the content and interactions discussed in these chapters takes place. Using images in this section will assist showing how joining and using Facebook is achieved. To the accuracy of this section's descriptions and illustrations of Facebook, two YouTube videos<sup>6</sup> have been consulted: a substantive how-to video by Di Coke (2018a) and a shorter video by Jeff Meland (2016).

Facebook appears on personal computers as well as Smart (cell) phones, though these illustrations assume use on a personal computer or laptop. This information is current at 2020, but as Facebook does updates over time, it will likely be different in content and appearance in the future. This section is not a comprehensive guide that covers every feature of the platform.

## Finding Facebook on the World Wide Web and Smart (Cell) Phones

Facebook exists on the World Wide Web at [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) and can be obtained as a Smart or Cell Phone application (app) from The Apple iPhone Store, Google Play or Android Phone. There are two ways to find Facebook:

1. Type in the Uniform Resource Locator (URL) web address into a web browser such as Firefox or Google Chrome: [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)
2. Use a search engine such as Google and type in the search box Facebook, which appears immediately in search results at the top of the page

Once found the following interface appears:

Figure 1. Facebook interface as at 2020

There are no fees for joining Facebook or maintaining it. You can either use an email address or a mobile phone as your account log in. Only two genders, male and female can be chosen, although in 2014 Facebook implemented a way of changing this after joining<sup>7</sup> (Walker, 2018; Fitzpatrick, 2014). A date of birth must be provided as you need to be 13 years or older to use Facebook. Those who are under 18 cannot be messaged by others as the message function is disabled. You also must supply a unique password that you will remember. If you forget your password or account log in once you start using Facebook, click on 'Forgotten account' under the password box and you will receive an email telling you how to do so.

Facebook can also be joined on a phone app. Figure 2 shows the Facebook smart phone interface:

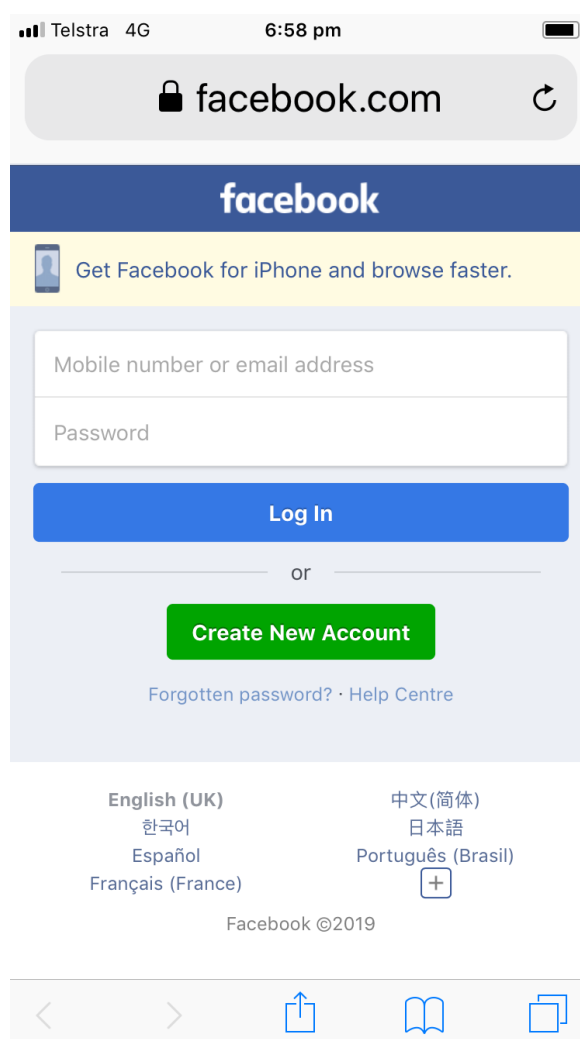


Figure 2. Facebook log on appearance on a smart phone as an app

Facebook will send an email or a mobile phone Short Message Service (SMS) with a 5-digit code that is entered in a screen that you must fill in before using it. This is to confirm the email address you gave Facebook is real. It also asks when you log on to add your mobile phone number so it can send you alerts and codes if you forget your password, though this is optional to use.

### Loading a Public Profile Photo

Once access is granted, Facebook asks the user to upload a profile picture or take a photo with your computer's webcam. Figure 3 demonstrates where on Facebook this is done, and your profile photo can be changed in the future:

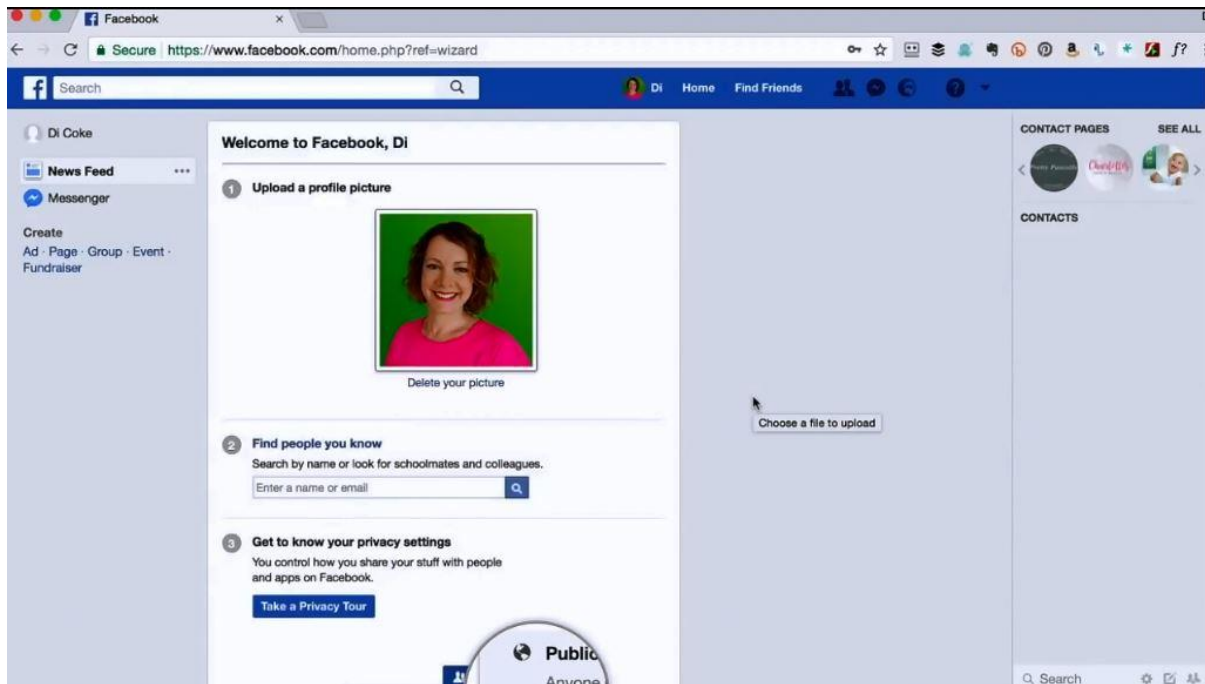


Figure 3. Loading a profile photo onto Facebook (Coke, 2018b)

## Facebook Privacy Settings

The decision to participate in Facebook and how much information and content can be seen by others is determined by its user's privacy settings. Posted content may be visible to potentially millions of people. There are certain types of settings that protect you from being trolled, bullied or harassed by others, while others can stop unnecessary invitations, spam and friend requests. It is important to consider these before you start posting on Facebook. Although you may be using maximum privacy settings, if you post on a public page such as a newspaper Facebook page, your post can be seen by anyone. You can also be found in some groups as your photo and link to your profile can be visible.

The reasons to carefully consider privacy settings are:

### 1. Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure is an act of revealing personal information to others that a person willingly communicates (Wang & Yu, 2018, p. 1216; Archer & Burleson, 1980; Wheelless & Grotz, 1976). How much you choose to disclose on Facebook needs to be considered as users may not appreciate the consequences of certain information being seen by anyone when your information or post is public (Nycyk, 2015a; Peluchette & Karl, 2010). Self-disclosure requires thought to what extent one wants people to know certain information about you. Many users have regretted posting something in anger or that caused offense to others, damaged their reputations and received abusive comments from others about it. Also, the post may be deleted but can be saved and kept by anyone by taking a screen shot of it.

To minimise and prevent this, you can post on your timeline but limit the post to only a few seeing it. It is common that some, especially those new to Facebook, will accidentally post something that they did not wish to, but that is part of the learning process of using it. Facebook has had a past reputation as being the platform to see and be seen despite it also



being viewed as a place where most content is about mundane features of one's life (Caers et al., 2013; Lee, 2012; Mesch & Beker, 2010; Yau & Schneider, 2009; Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2008; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2008).

## 2. Information Sensitivity

Information sensitivity is a person's level of wanted privacy toward their data, in particularly certain types of it (Wang & Yu, 2018, p. 1216). The more sensitive the information is the more unlikely it is wanted to have it disclosed to the public (Wang & Yu, 2018; Bansal, Zahedi & Gefen, 2010). Do not assume your information cannot in some way be seen by anyone. For example, if you join a public or some private Facebook groups it can still be seen by friends or others if you are a member of that group. Caution about one's willingness to be identified as a member of a Facebook group needs to be considered before joining a group.

## 3. Privacy Concerns

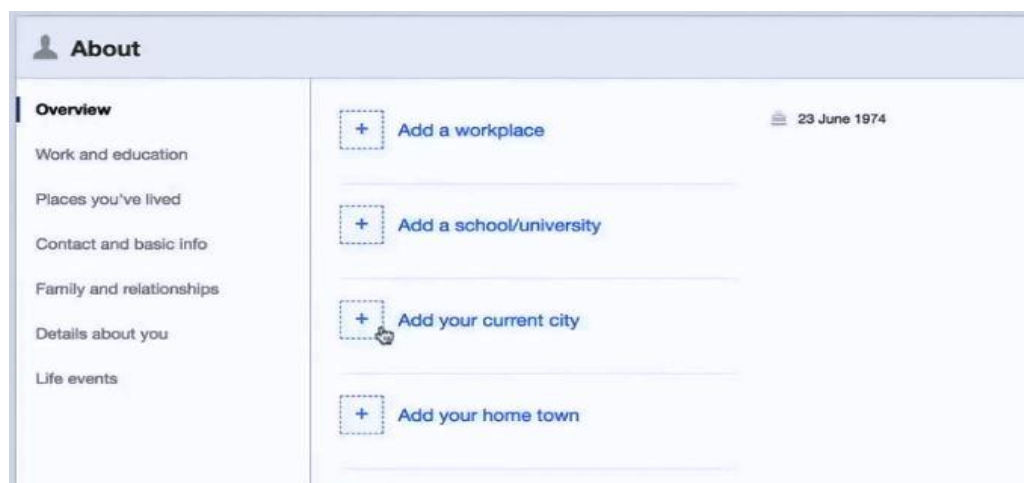
This is linked to the individual's trust, or not, in any social media platform and often influences the user in the content they are willing to post to it. A definition relevant to this idea is that privacy concerns are the degree to which "an individual believes that the organizational practices and infrastructure exist to prevent privacy breach" (Xu & Gupta, 2009, p. 140 cited in Wang & Yu, 2018, p. 1217). There are some unavoidable parts of Facebook that will show up online in public and it is possible to find posts someone has written even if their account is private. The Google search engine has web crawler software that captures postings and images from within Facebook that become searchable even by those who do not have a Facebook account. There is an option in Facebook settings that can be selected to not appear in Google and other search engine searches.

Examples of concerns that are related to the lack of privacy and protection of Facebook user data are:

- Being identified by accident as having done something you have not and receiving online abuse
- Cyberbullying
- Doxxing<sup>8</sup>
- Employers searching your Facebook data before hiring basing decisions on the perceived image or reputation your posts convey (Clark & Roberts, 2010)
- Finding out information that was not meant to be public, such as one's sexuality
- Having your postings and information that you have on Facebook used for targeted unwanted advertising
- Identity Theft
- Trolling

- Unwanted sexual advances or harassment resulting in you constantly blocking people contacting you because your account can be found by everyone on Facebook, though you have the choice not to answer any messages or approve friend requests from these users

Facebook will ask you when setting up your account for more optional information. It can ask you to complete your profile when you do not want to and ask you if you want your Facebook friends to know when it is your birthday. Figure 4 shows the About page. It should be noted that first, you do not have to fill these out and second you can change them anytime. However, looking at Figure 4 you can see that the more you fill out the more that will be on public display to other Facebook users, although you can control who sees this information:



*Figure 4.* About section on Facebook where you can decide what details will be seen by others about your life (Coke, 2018c)

Privacy settings are important and an individual's choice, but there have been many instances where the privacy settings have failed. Facebook provides a default list of options contained in the Privacy Settings and Tools section shown in Figures 5 and 6<sup>9</sup>. Each of them gives several privacy options. Figure 5 shows the interface as at 2020. Note that to the left of the figure there are further options that do relate to privacy. Only some will be discussed later in this chapter as the ones discussed relate specifically to the privacy aspect of this chapter.

These settings relate to the activity you post on Facebook and the choices made for how much access to grant other people to look at your posts or friend you. Figure 6 is a second part of this Privacy Settings and Tools page:

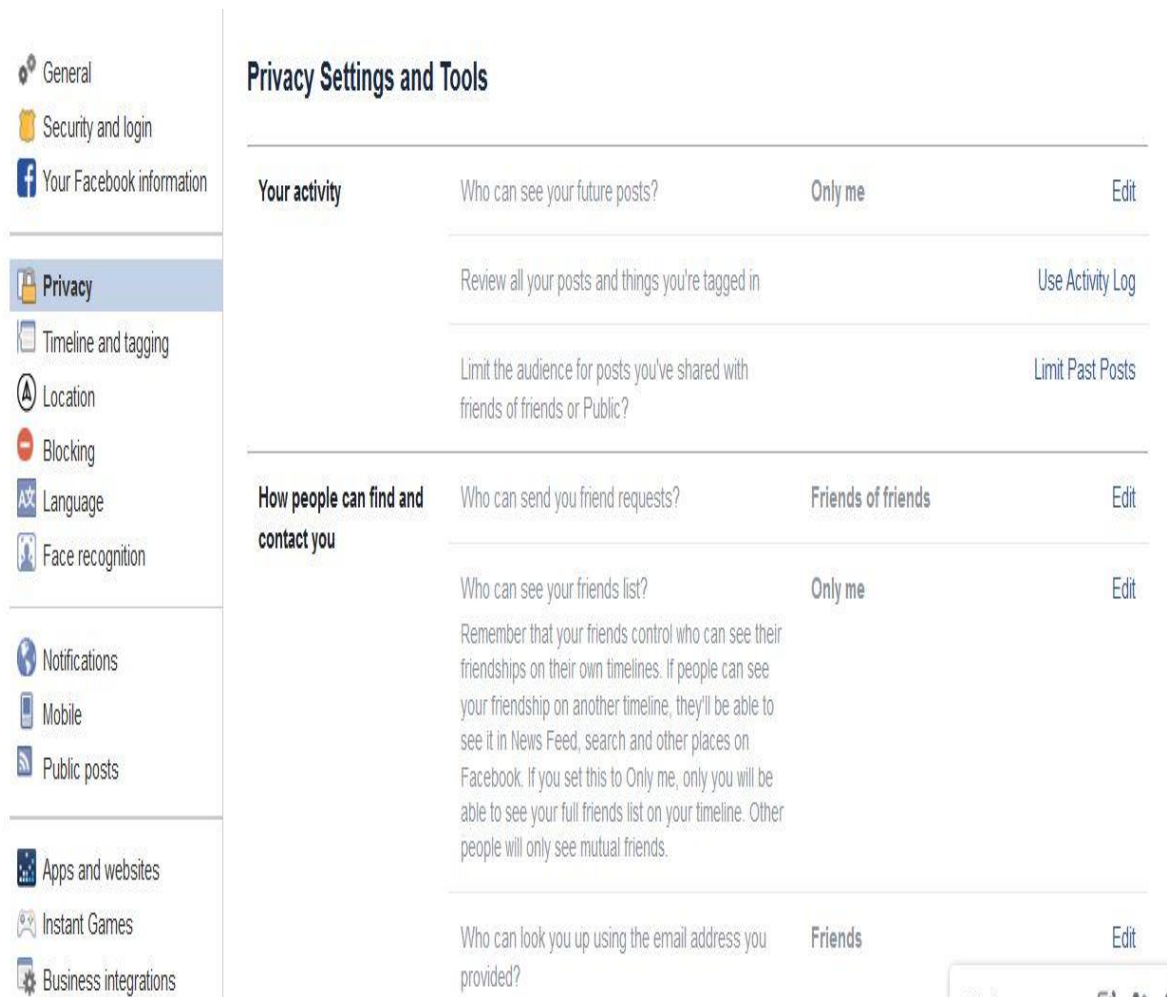


Figure 5. Facebook's privacy options image 1 as at 2020

How people can find and contact you is also important to consider. It should be noted that it is unavoidable to have people contact you in some way. Those that can send you requests are either Everyone or Friends of friends. This means if you choose Friend of friends as an option and you are friends with someone on Facebook, your friend's friends can send a friend request. You can refuse and mark the request as spam so they cannot send another request in the future.

Some users dislike others seeing who they are friends with, hence why option two has a see Friends List option to prevent viewing who you are friends with. For this to work you choose Only Me. However, when your friends post on your wall someone can work out its one of your friends by likes or comments. It is also a good idea to leave finding your provided email address that you give to Facebook as Friends, not set it to Everyone or many can contact you by finding your personal email address on Facebook.

Below the look up email address option are two further choices to make. Often a user will provide their mobile phone number to Facebook. This means people can find your number and ring you. Another privacy choice is asking you if you want your profile to be found on search engines. The profiles can be found on many search engines not just Google. If someone typed in "John Smith Facebook" into a search engine and the Yes option is taken,

you can be found especially if your surname is rare. It is advisable to use the No option for this.

How people can find and contact you	Who can send you friend requests?	Everyone	<a href="#">Edit</a>
	Who can see your friends list? Remember that your friends control who can see their friendships on their own timelines. If people can see your friendship on another timeline, they'll be able to see it in News Feed, search and other places on Facebook. If you set this to Only me, only you will be able to see your full friends list on your timeline. Other people will only see mutual friends.	Only me	<a href="#">Edit</a>
	Who can look you up using the email address you provided?	Friends	<a href="#">Edit</a>
	Who can look you up using the phone number you provided?	Friends	<a href="#">Edit</a>
	Do you want search engines outside of Facebook to link to your Profile?	No	<a href="#">Edit</a>

Figure 6. Highlighted two further privacy options image 2 2020

Two features that were added to Facebook much later in its history became privacy concerns. These are: being tagged in posted photos and Facial recognition in photos.

### 1. Tagging and being Tagged in Facebook Photos

This means the user, their friends or another Facebook user who is not a friend, can create a link to a person's Facebook profile. If you tag a friend in your status update, anyone who sees that update can click on your friend's name and go to their profile (Facebook, n.d.a). The person tagged is notified of the tag. If you or a friend tags someone in your post, the post could be visible to the audience you selected plus friends of the tagged person (Facebook, n.d.a).

Figure 7 shows the privacy controls setting for tagging. For optimal privacy it is best to set the tagging options to Only Me for options one and two, while the third No one. Note also that people can still tag you but these options exist to minimise you being found:

Tagging	Who can see posts that you're tagged in on your timeline?	Only me	Edit
	When you're tagged in a post, who do you want to add to the audience of the post if they can't already see it?	Only me	Edit
	Who sees tag suggestions when photos that look like you are uploaded?	No one.	Edit

Figure 7. Facebook tagging privacy options

## 2. Facebook Face Recognition Settings

In 2017 Facebook introduced new user facial identification abilities that built upon those existing since 2010. Candela (2017), Director of Applied Machine Learning at Facebook, describes how it works and what to do about it:

Since 2010, face recognition technology has helped bring people closer together on Facebook. Our technology analyzes the pixels in photos you're already tagged in and generates a string of numbers we call a template. When photos and videos are uploaded to our systems, we compare those images to the template.

You control whether Facebook can recognize you in photos and videos. Soon, you will begin to see a simple on/off switch instead of settings for individual features that use face recognition technology. We designed this as an on/off switch because people gave us feedback that they prefer a simpler control than having to decide for every single feature using face recognition technology.

Rob Sherman, head of Facebook privacy in 2017, claimed that the reason for this privacy feature came from people posting photos of you, but you not being informed this has happened (Vincent, 2017). Simonite (2017) reported the following about Facebook's reason for implementing face recognition for untagged photos:

Once Facebook identifies you in a photo, it will display a notification that leads to a new Photo Review dialog. There you can choose to tag yourself in the image, message the user who posted an image, inform Facebook that the face isn't you, or report an image for breaching the site's rules.

Interestingly, this feature is not available in the European Union or Canada due to their privacy laws (Vincent, 2017). Therefore, if you feel Facebook's face recognition function is concerning, Figure 8 shows the privacy setting of Face recognition settings marked Yes, that can be changed to No:

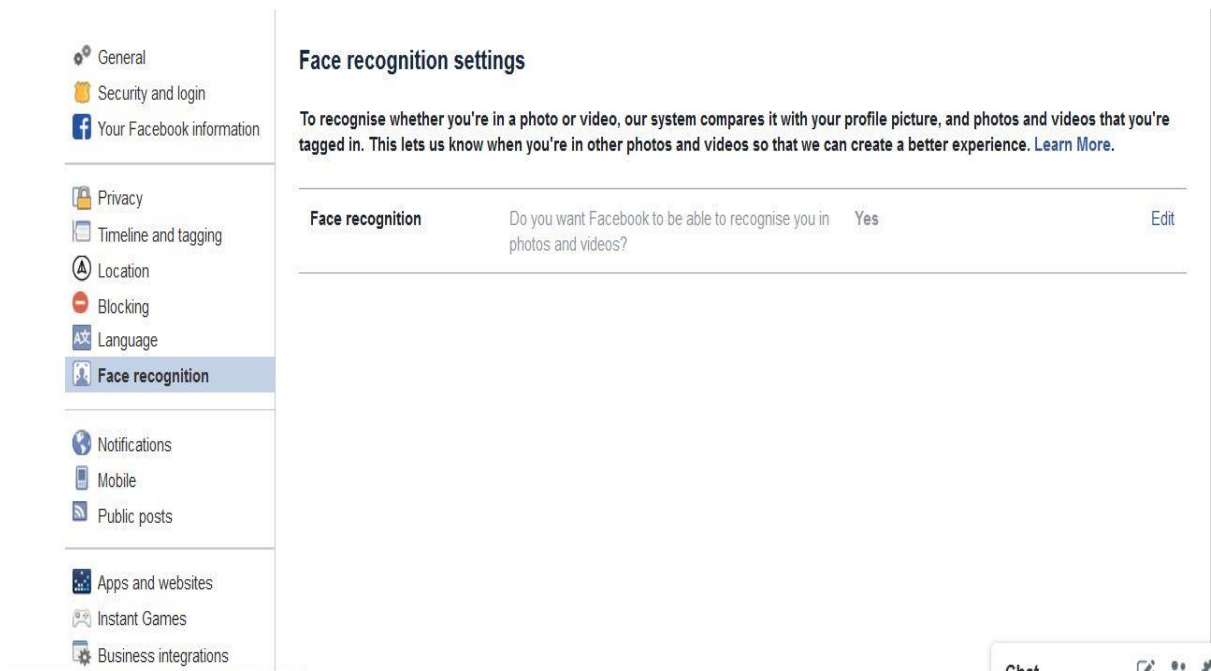


Figure 8. Where to turn off Facebook's facial recognition feature

## Controlling Facebook's News Feed

When you log on to Facebook it takes you to this screen shown in Figure 9 called the News Feed Screen:

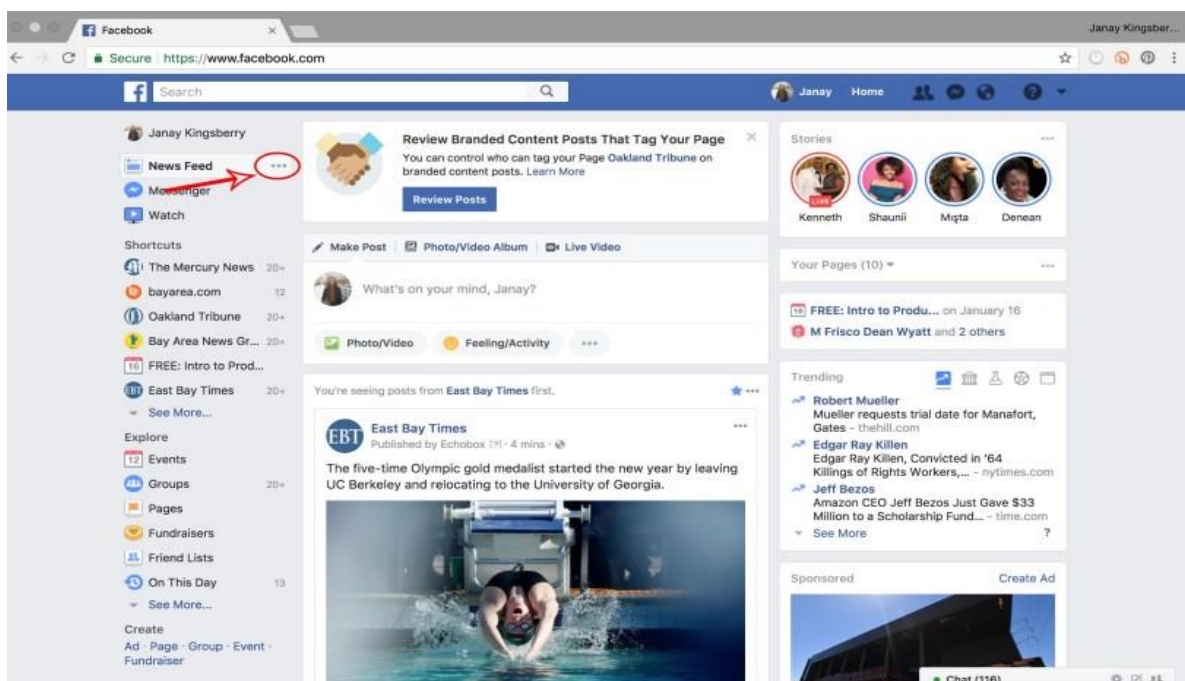


Figure 9. Facebook News Feed as at 2020 (Kingsberry, 2018)

The goal of the Facebook News Feed is simplistically, but accurately, described by Constone<sup>10</sup> (2016):

Facebook's objective is to select the most relevant and engaging stories to show in the News Feed. It wants to choose the best content out of several thousand potential stories that could appear in your News Feed each day, and put those in the first few dozen slots that you'll actually browse through.

These stories get ranked and shown in order of importance, from big stuff like your sibling getting married or a news article that 10 of your friends have shared, to the average links shared by brands to their websites, to boring stories like a distant acquaintance RSVPing for an event.

Facebook (n.d.b) explains how the News Feed works and the types of posts that appears in them:

News Feed is the constantly updating list of stories in the middle of your home page. News Feed includes status updates, photos, videos, links, app activity and likes from people, Pages and groups that you follow on Facebook.

What kinds of posts will I see in News Feed?

Posts that you see in News Feed are meant to keep you connected to the people, places and things that you care about, starting with your friends and family.

Posts that you see first are influenced by your connections and activity on Facebook. The number of comments, likes and reactions a post receives and what kind of story it is (example: photo, video, status update) can also make it more likely to appear higher up in your News Feed.

Posts that you might see first include:

- A friend or family member commenting on or liking another friend's photo or status update.
- A person reacting to a post from a publisher that a friend has shared.
- Multiple people replying to each other's comments on a video they watched or an article they read in News Feed.

The Facebook Algorithm has become a privacy issue because it has been seen as violating the users' privacy and choices to see the content they want to see and avoiding seeing unwanted content in their feed. Swan (2018) gives a definition of the Facebook Algorithm and the factors that influence it:

The Facebook Algorithm is a process that ranks all available posts that can display on a user's News Feed based on how likely that user will have a positive reaction.

Facebook's Algorithm for ranking and displaying content on your News Feed is based on four factors:

1. The inventory of all posts available to display
2. Signals that tell Facebook what each post is
3. Predictions on how you will react to each post
4. A final score assigned to the content based on all factors considered

You can control what is seen in the news feed. For example, you may not want to see every single friend's post, especially when your number of friends starts numbering in the hundreds. In what is named the red crab page, Figure 10 shows how the feed can be controlled:

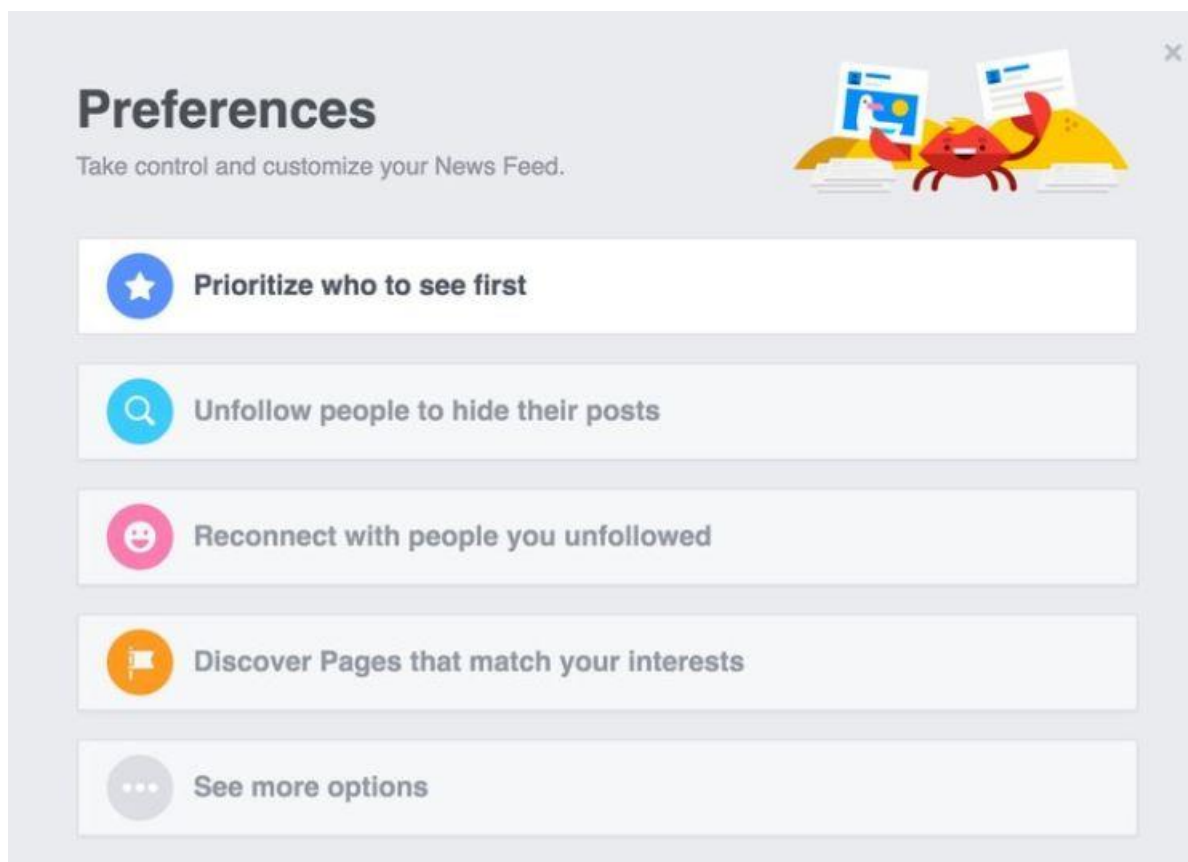


Figure 10. Screen to alter Facebook user News Feed

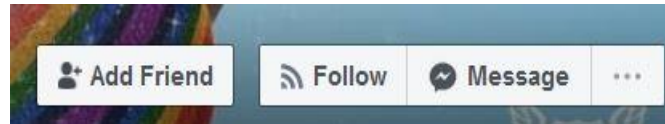
### Facebook Friending and Unfriending

When you join Facebook, you have an option to make a friend request or receive and approve a friend request. Users can control who initially can ask for a friendship request. The maximum number of friends a personal Facebook user can have is 5000. There are five different ways to either be offered the ability to friend or not friend someone. They all depend on the wishes of the user which, as illustrated before, is set in Facebook's Privacy controls. Although it is a choice to friend or not, another option the user can choose is to allow people to follow your public posts and see them in their News Feed. When you friend someone you will get all their new posts in the News Feed unless you specifically unfollow them.



The five choices the users have to set their ability to allow friend requests or not are:

1. The Add Friend button is visible, allowing anyone to make a friend request and allowing others you don't want as friends to follow you:



*Figure 11.* 3 options for Facebook friending

2. This functions the same as the option in Figure 11, but does not allow anyone to follow you:



*Figure 12.* Add Friend but cannot be followed by anyone

3. This user cannot be sent a Facebook friend request or be followed:



*Figure 13.* Cannot add friend only message user

4. This user can have their public posts viewed in the News Feed and message the user:



*Figure 14.* Follow and message user only

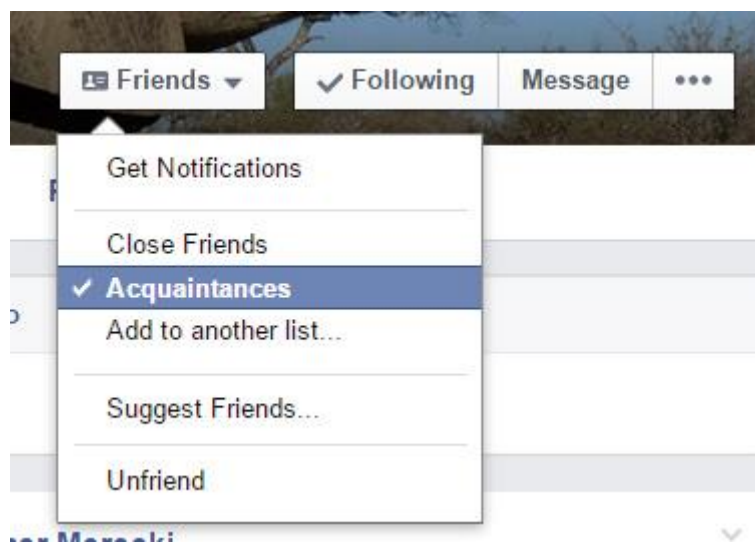
5. This user is likely to be under 18 years of age. Facebook will automatically not allow anyone to send a friend request or message to the user. This option also prevents the user from accessing adult content, such as pages or groups, providing the administrator or owner of that Facebook page or group has set their page to prevent those uses under 18 years of age from accessing it:



*Figure 15.* Cannot friend request, message or follow user

Once you send a friend request it can be accepted and you will sometimes receive a message on Facebook in Messenger that you are both connected. If it is rejected the person can mark your request as Spam preventing you from making a friend request with them again.

Friends can be sorted and organised with lists made where some friends can see certain posts you make and others cannot. This is the acquaintance list, with Figure 16 showing how you can choose someone to be an acquaintance, not a friend, by clicking on the friends' button, although this can be achieved as well in your friend's list elsewhere on Facebook:





*Figure 16.* Change a friend to an acquaintance (Be Web Smart, 2015)

What this means is if you friend close friends, family or relatives, but also work colleagues or anyone else, you may want to show photographs or posts you do not want others to see. In the post section you can change who see's your post. As at 2020, Facebook's help site<sup>11</sup> provides information on the many types of managing your friends and posts. It takes time to get to become familiar with dividing your friends into lists, as well as depending on what posts you may want to be seen by whom. Figure 17 is from the Help Centre Friends List page and shows the three types of options presented on Facebook for the user to consider (Facebook, n.d.c.):

## Your friend lists on Facebook

To help you get started, you have friend lists for:

-  **Close Friends:** Friends you may want to share exclusively with. You will get notifications when they post, but can turn these extra notifications off at any time.
-  **Acquaintances:** People you might want to share less with. You can choose to exclude these people when you post something, by choosing **Friends except Acquaintances** in the audience selector.
-  **Restricted:** This list is for people you've added as a friend but just don't want to share with, like your boss. When you add someone to your **Restricted** list, they will only be able to see your **Public** content or posts of yours that you tag them in.

You can also create custom lists to organize friends as you like. You choose who goes into these lists and what (if any) privacy restrictions apply. Note that your friends won't get notified when you add them to custom lists.

Figure 17. Organising friends' user options (Facebook, n.d.c.)

Facebook friends are not like ones in the physical world as they are seen as weak ties that can be broken at any moment by unfriending (or defriending which means the same action to stop interacting online with another) someone. Often friends are 'culled' because many users find it easier to friend someone than say no to the request, ending up with too many they do not interact with, hence why they defriend them (boyd, 2006).

The term unfriend is defined in the Oxford Dictionary (2019) as to remove a person from a list of friends on a social networking site. Figure 18 shows how this is done:

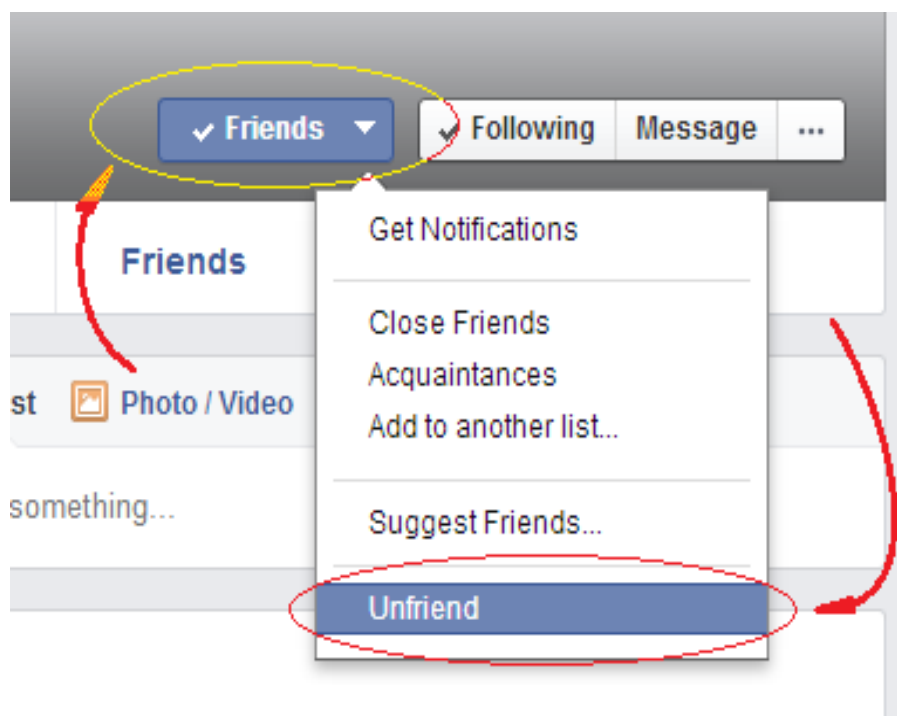


Figure 18. Unfriending procedure on Facebook (ROM Cartridge, 2018)

Debates about who is, or is not, a friend, and what the word friend means in the context of social media sites like Facebook have been ongoing. People who are Facebook friends do meet offline; however, some do not for many reasons even if they live in the same geographic location. Friends may become partners or friends or may meet each other socially. But there has always been a contention amongst scholars, and the public, that Facebook friends are not really friends in the traditional sense of a close relationship with someone you keep in contact with. Page (2011, p. 67) illustrates a commonly held view on the concept of Facebook friendship that it is actually not a reflection of offline friend relationships at all:

The Facebook Friend relationship is reciprocal (once a Friend is confirmed to a Facebook member, both can see each other's profile) and mimics peer-to-peer interaction. However, Facebook "Friends" should not be taken as synonymous with offline friendship, and the social ties between a Facebook member and the individual people on their Friend list will vary considerably.

In one study (Richardson & Hessey, 2009) it was stated that Facebook friend relations have a falsity and that virtual friendships erode and weaken social relations (Richardson & Hessey, 2009; Spencer & Pahl, 2006). For others, Facebook offers virtual companionship, interaction with others, and can be for some a simple extension of their offline life. Research suggests the motivations for joining Facebook is to fulfil unmet needs for social contact and connection (Young, Kuss, Griffiths & Howard, 2017; Masur, Reinecke, Ziegele & Quiring, 2014; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011). The experience of Facebook friending will not be the same for everyone.

### **Blocking Users, Pages and Groups**

Despite being able to have maximum privacy settings, Facebook users are still trolled<sup>12</sup> or abused in some form on it. People can also argue with each other if they have a falling out or clash on opinions. Blocking can be a hurtful offensive thing to do, but it there to protect you from harmful interactions with others. Some users may unfriend a person but do not block them.

Blocking can be done in three areas: other users, pages and groups. Users are those you are, or are not, Facebook friends with. There is a difference between Facebook pages and groups explained by Ellis (2018):

A Facebook page is basically a non-personal profile page - such as a profile for a company, brand, organization, or website. You can also have Facebook pages for public figures such as politicians and celebrities. Pages differ from a typical Facebook profile in that they can be run by multiple people, they can be followed or liked by anyone on Facebook, and their posts can be monetized and promoted... A Facebook page's purpose is to connect with an audience.

A Facebook group acts as a hub for discussion and sharing information with people who share an interest, location, or other common trait. For example, there are groups for people who work in the design industry, groups for people in the same neighbourhood, and groups for people interested in AI technology.

Figure 19<sup>13</sup> shows an example of a page on Facebook while Figure 20<sup>14</sup> shows an example of a group:

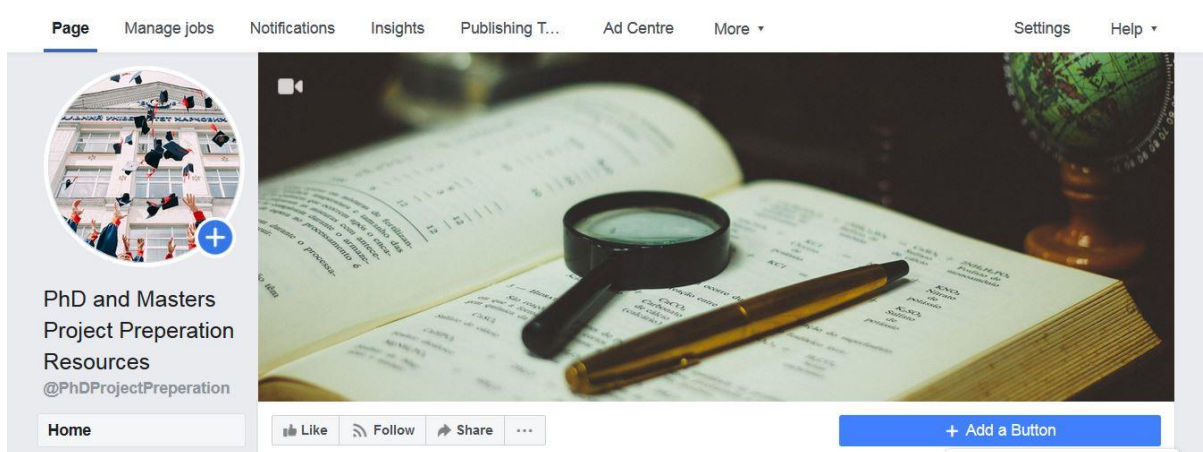


Figure 19. A Facebook page example (PhD and Masters Project Preparation Resources, n.d.)



Figure 20. A Facebook group example (Academic CV Writing Resources, n.d.)

Groups are catered to a particular audience and can be public (posts are viewable even if you are not a member), closed or secret, with secret groups being the type where you cannot be seen as a member of it by anyone except other members of the group<sup>15</sup>. Sometimes other Facebook users will add you without your permission. Therefore, it is important to know how to remove yourself from pages and groups and block them.

Figure 21 shows how to block being in a group. It is done by clicking on the Joined button and choosing the Leave Group option. However, Figure 22 shows an extra step to prevent other members of the group from joining you up as some users may find themselves a member again when they never asked to rejoin:



Figure 21. How to leave a Facebook group



Figure 22. Tick box to prevent someone making you part of the same Facebook group

By contrast, leaving and blocking a Facebook page is similar to blocking another Facebook user which will be explained shortly. An example of a Facebook page is given in Figure 23:

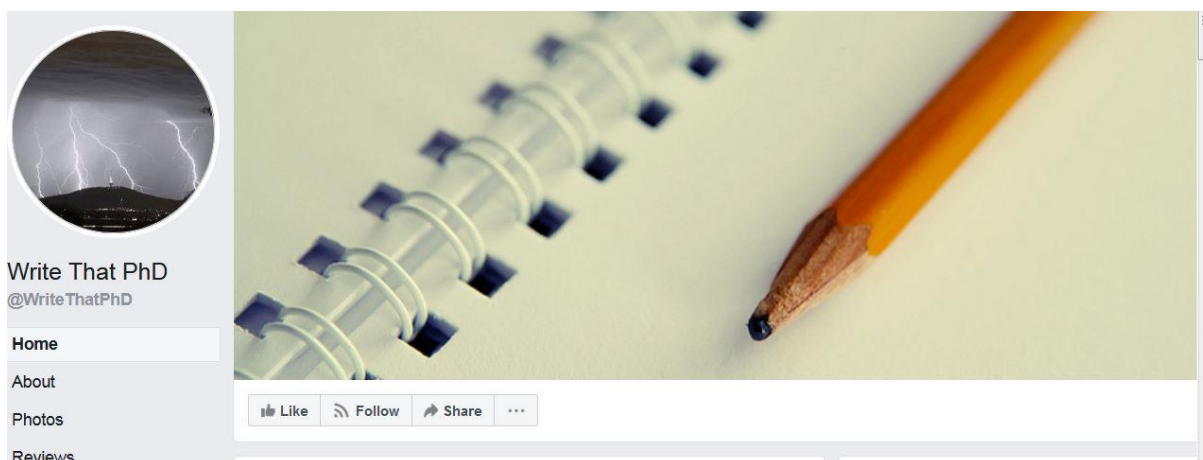


Figure 23. Example of a Facebook page (Write That PhD, n.d.)

To block a page, click on the ... button and six options appear, as Figure 24 shows, selecting the Block Page option:

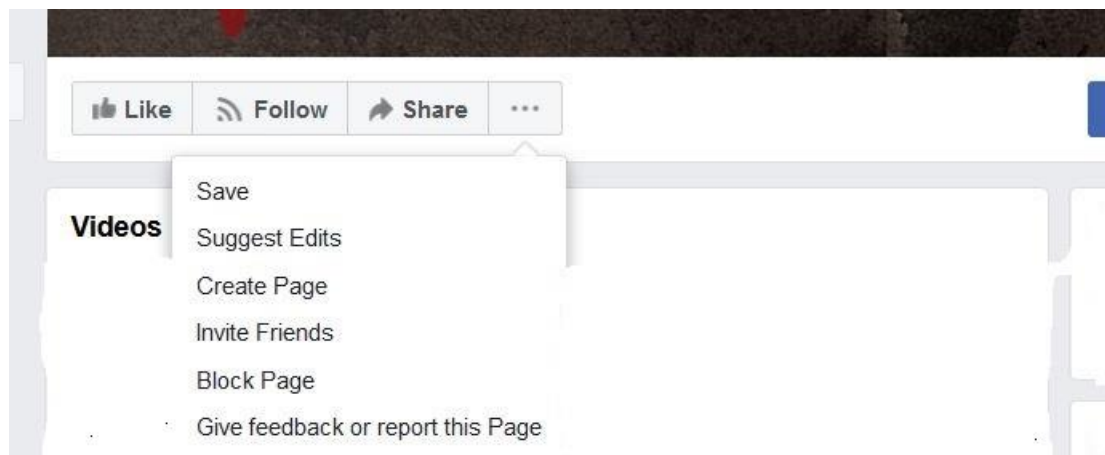


Figure 24. Blocking a Facebook page

Facebook gives a choice to confirm blocking the page as Figure 25 shows:

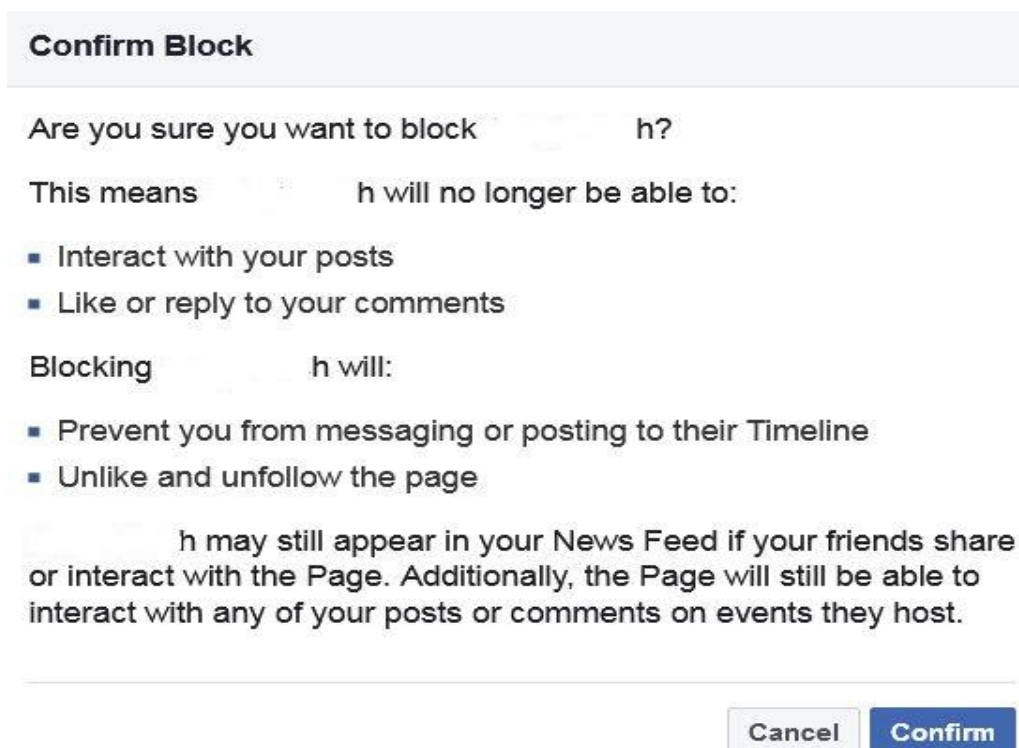


Figure 25. Message confirming blocking a page

To confirm that the page has been blocked Figure 26 shows a message. However, you can still view the page but no one on that page can contact you, you cannot be invited by others to like and join the page and you cannot comment on any of the posts on that page:

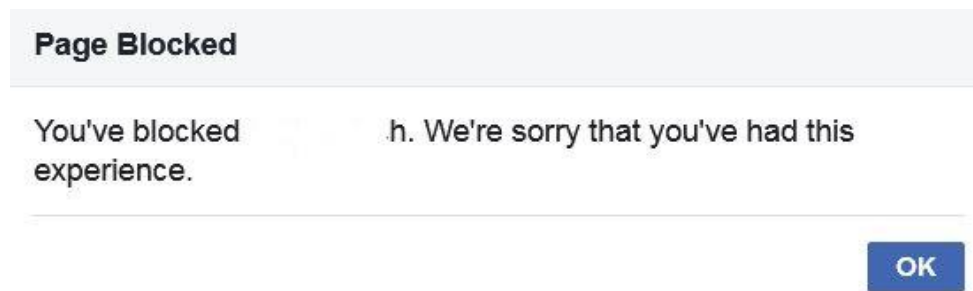


Figure 26. Message from Facebook confirming page blocked

The ways to block other Facebook users is important to be aware of because of the many issues that others who use Facebook can do that are annoying, upsetting or, in one's view, not welcome for any reason. As a safety feature, it allows breaking off online contact with someone that may be for any reason harmful or annoying to the user. This is also known as unfriending, a term that has become embedded in the culture of using Facebook. However, doing this can also offend or upset the person who is unfriended.

Blocking is illustrated in Figure 27, where you click on the ... button next to the message button:

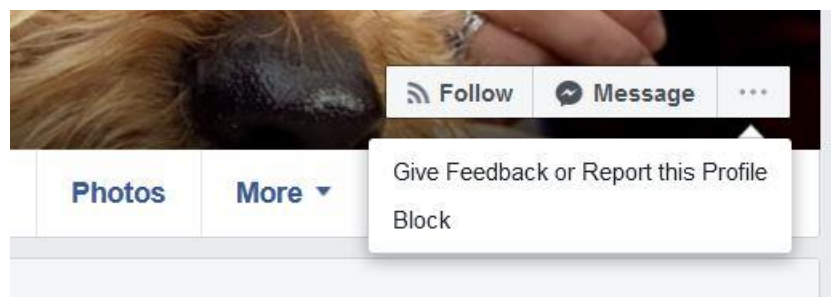


Figure 27. Button to click to report or block profile

You are then asked to confirm the block to which you press on the Confirm button, as shown in Figure 28:



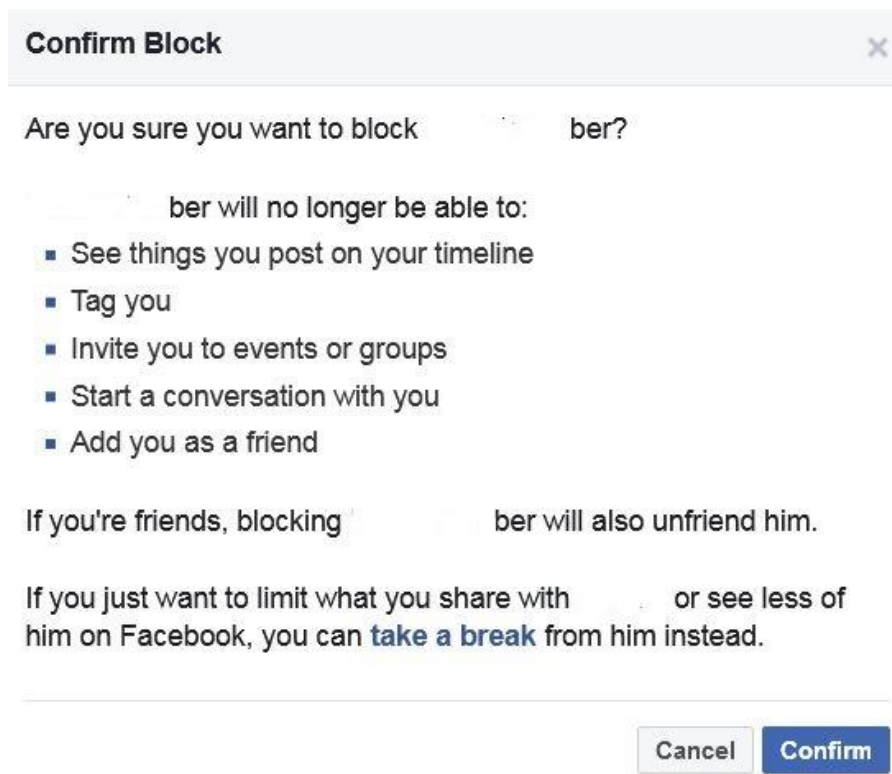


Figure 28. Facebook blocking message

A message appears confirming you have blocked the user, to which you press the OK button as Figure 29 shows:

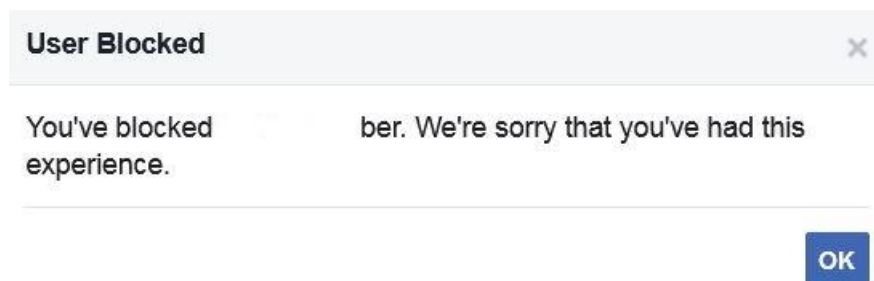


Figure 29. Facebook User Blocked message

If you unblock someone you have to wait 48 hours until you are able to block them again. In the General Account settings, the block function is accessed by clicking on the Blocking setting which is a red circle, as shown in Figure 30:

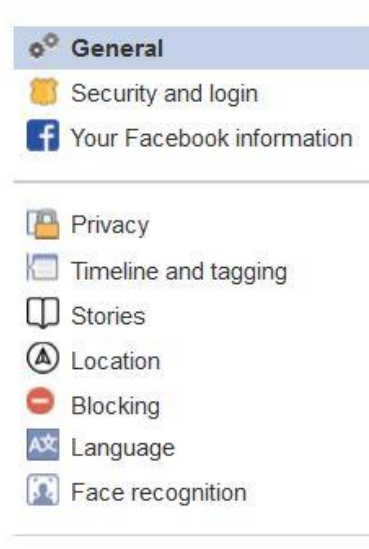


Figure 30. Access to blocked users

A list of blocked users then appears, with next to their name a blue Unblock function that can be clicked on to which you will be asked if you want to unblock them:

#### Block users

Once you block someone, that person can no longer see things you post on your timeline, tag you, invite you to events or groups, start a conversation with you, or add you as a friend. Note: Does not include apps, games or groups you both participate in.



Figure 31. List of blocked users and how to unblock them

If a Facebook user has blocked you, you will see this message:



Figure 32. Facebook message blocking someone or being blocked

If you still want to remain friends with a person but not see their posts there are two ways to manage this. Unfollowing them but not unfriending helps, but a temporary solution Facebook created is Snoozing the friend for 30 days which removes their post from your feed.

The principle that underlies all the topics examined in this book is that participating in Facebook and controlling the information and content you post are important. Unfriending and blocking gives an option to control who you interact with. Yet as social media has become more widespread, users do take unfriending personally. Why people unfriend and

block has become the subject of research studies. To some, unfriending other users is not an issue nor is being unfriended. However, some are emotionally hurt by being unfriended.

Bevan, Pfyl and Barclay (2012) call Facebook unfriending a form of 'Relationship Termination'. Although unfriending has been very common since Facebook's availability (Madden, 2012), research suggests that it does matter to people when they are unfriended without explanation. In predominantly statistical experimental studies, a common set of reasons for unfriending were found by Hensley (2018), Onat, Uluçay and Gülay, (2017), Gashi and Knautz, (2016), John and Dvir-Gvirsman (2015), Bevan, Pfyl and Barclay (2012), Carpenter (2012) and Sibona and Walczak (2011) that are:

- Betrayal, such as disclosing information to other Facebook users when asked not to
- Clean out friends so the user can concentrate on real relationships
- Constant fishing for likes and approval comments
- Constant posting of shirtless or near naked photos
- Cyberbullying
- Disliking a Facebook friend's online behaviours
- Excessive posts
- Excessive swearing (subjective as some friends may not be concerned)
- Food photos and posting
- Having conflicts and disagreements
- Inappropriate and unwanted flirting comments towards any gender
- Machiavellianism<sup>16</sup>
- Narcissism<sup>17</sup>
- No longer sharing interests or hobbies
- Oversharing information
- Posting on polarising topics, especially politics and religions
- Stalking
- Too much posting of baby photos (subjective, depends on how frequent posted)
- The user's offline behaviours are of concern
- Trying to get you to buy things you do not want

Although some may appear to be more serious than others, this sample of unfriending reasons accounts for why you may unfriend or block another user. To illustrate further, oversharing is putting too much information about you and your life that can be viewed with discomfort by your Facebook friends. They may accuse you of wanting constant attention and validation. Ridenour (2011) views oversharing as:

Sometimes, however, oversharing can happen without one even realizing it. On Facebook, if I post a comment about a certain friend's status update, all of my friends and all of my friend's friends can read, and comment on, my comment. People who I do not know at all and whom I have never met can read my thoughts and comments on any number of subjects. If my friend takes a stand about a political subject on his/her Facebook and I make a comment agreeing or disagreeing, a significant number of strangers will now have personal information about who I am. I may not have intended for my comment to be read by all of those people, and they may not understand and interpret my comment the way

that I meant it because my comment was for my friend, who I know and who knows me. They may not know the history behind the comment and thus may totally miss my point. Instantly, people will have thoughts and opinions and will begin to share them, as well. I have seen many seemingly innocent Facebook posts turn into all-out wars featuring heated comments volleyed back and forth - and the person who posted the original status update is not even involved!

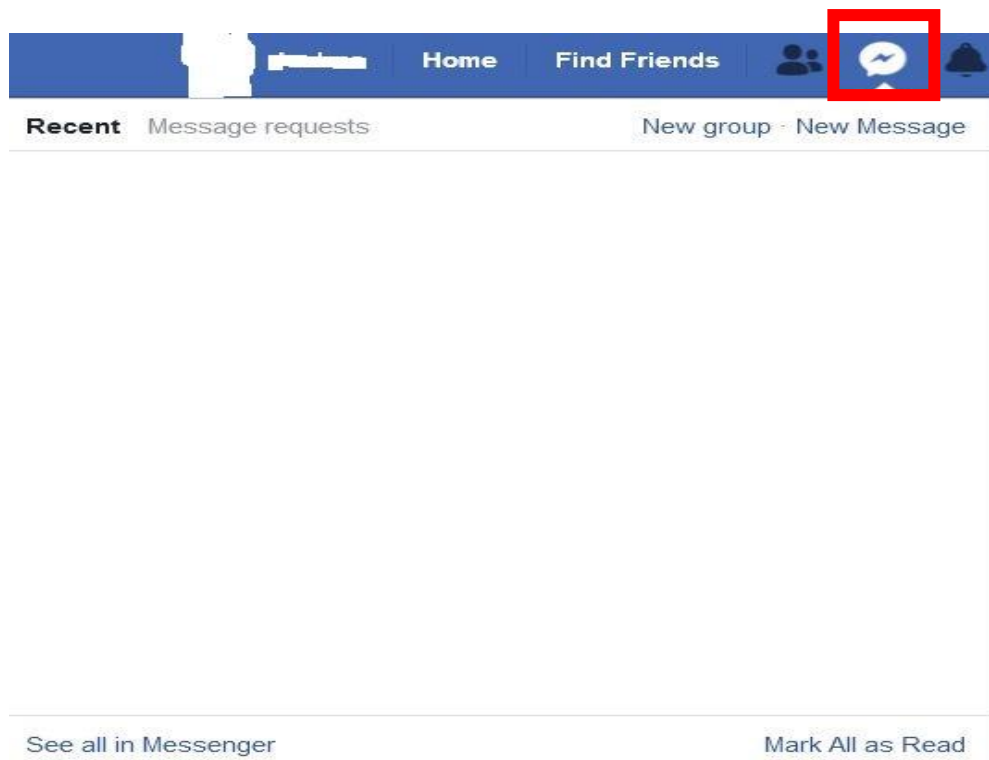
You also need to be careful, even if your Facebook is set to being a private account, when you post content in Facebook groups. Although many groups exist to give forms of support to Facebook users encountering problems, which has existed previously in closed virtual communities, overly emotional content is perceived as less appropriate for public sharing (Buehler, 2017). In this case, it is best to consider joining groups which are private where outsiders cannot see the content unless they are members of it. While still a risk someone can take a screen capture of your comments, they are overall reasonably safe spaces on Facebook to post comments. Being aware of the consequences of commenting is still a wise strategy to use when posting anything on Facebook.

### **Facebook Messenger**

A final privacy issue to consider when joining Facebook is the use of Messenger. Messaging apps are chat applications enabling users to instant message and connect with each other through their computers or mobile devices (Munroe, 2018). They are used to exchange data between one or more people such as text messages, photos, videos and files such as Word Documents or Spreadsheets. It is simply a way of communicating with another through using Facebook on a personal computer, laptop or using a phone app<sup>18</sup>.

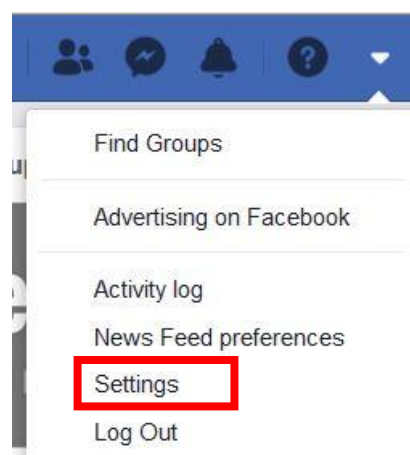
The scale of Facebook Messenger is ubiquitous, large-scale and, despite controversies<sup>19</sup> around it, used by billions of Facebook users (Nieborg & Helmond, 2019). The move from messenger just for personal communication and file sharing has given way to it being used for commercial purposes, such as ordering a ride-sharing service like Uber<sup>20</sup>, voice calling and, only in the United States, transfer of money (Zeng, 2016).

Figure 33 shows, as at June 2020, what Facebook Messenger looks like. It is found by clicking on the white word bubble that has a lightning bolt through it. Four steps are shown in this figure how to use this platform:

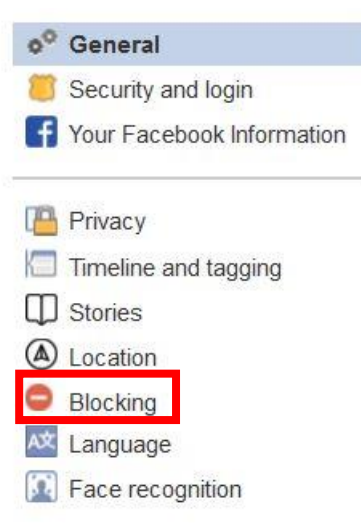


If you receive a message from someone you do not want to interact with who you are not Facebook friends with, the following steps are taken (Facebook, n.d.e.; Archambault, 2019; Taylor, 2018):

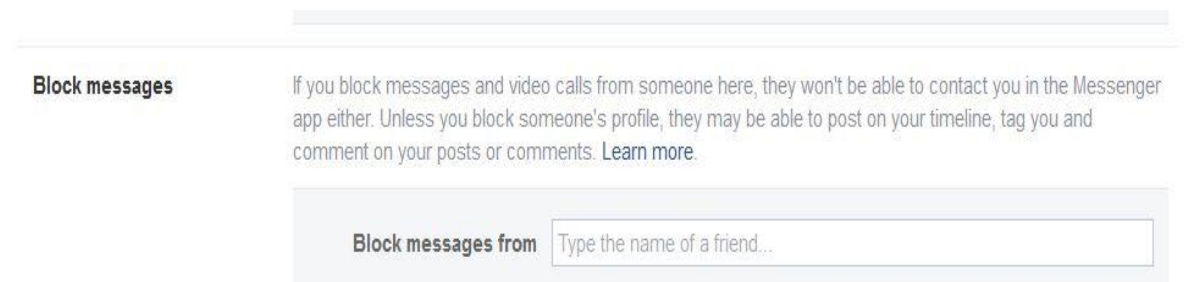
1. Go to settings from the main Facebook page and click on it:



2. Click on the blocking option:



3. A box comes up where you type in the name of the person to block messages:



When you block a Facebook user message from them are automatically blocked, you do not have to do the above procedures.

4. To check you have blocked them from messaging this message will be seen:

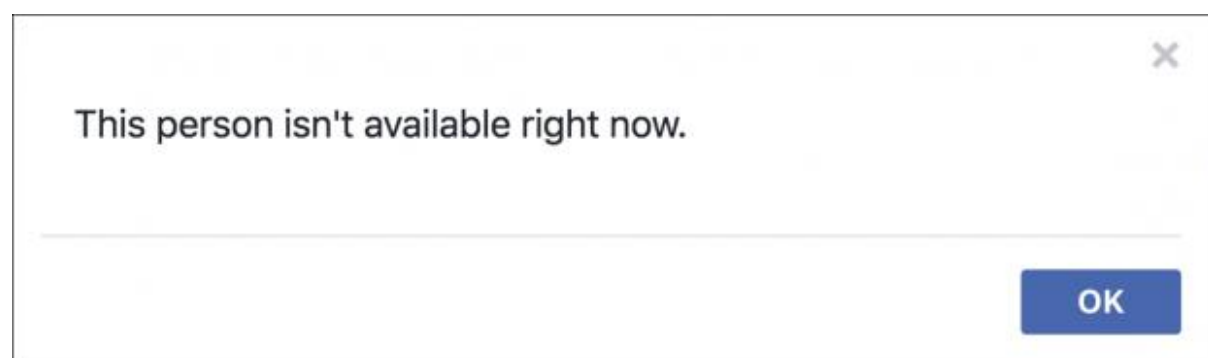


Figure 33. The Facebook Messenger platform and 4 steps for using it

The only time you may see another's message is in a group conversation where you and the person had been involved in previously. If this happens you will receive a warning that you can see the others' message.

Facebook messenger is another part of Facebook where you can receive unwanted messages or images. It is advisable also not to respond to messages where you do not know the person as they may be scammers and do not click on any links that you did not ask to be sent to you.

### **Conclusions on Facebook's Features and Characteristics**

This section's purpose was to introduce how to join and use Facebook and show the environment where the issues this book discusses takes place. Its underlying theme was how to securely use it and considered several issues that a user may encounter. These points should be noted about this section:

- It is current as at June 2020 but Facebook may change any aspect of joining it and increase security measures in the future.
- It is not complete; there more features and functions that Facebook has when joining it and security measures will change over time.
- Blocking other Facebook users does not always ensure someone will try to contact you again, so be vigilant when getting friend and message requests.

### **Countries where Facebook is Banned or has Limited Access**

Facebook is not available to be used in some countries for different reasons. Sometimes Facebook is temporarily shut down by a government in the event of political unrest. The reasons for banning are numerous, but include: conservative attitudes in certain countries especially where religious governments rule, controlling the population's access to information, distrust of immoral and permissive Western societies and a concern the population could challenge the government and cause civil unrest.

As at June 2020 the following countries restrict or ban access to Facebook:

- China banned yet people use alternative apps such as WeChat
- North Korean banned outright with punishment for its use
- Iran banned but some citizens have obtained access
- Cuba, Pakistan, Syria, Egypt and Chad in Africa, Sri Lanka and Malaysia are examples of Facebook banned temporarily normally due to political reasons

Offending religious beliefs are especially a cause of Facebook being banned. Kirkland (2014) gives this example of a temporary Facebook ban in Bangladesh:

The posting of a cartoon to Facebook saw the networking site shut down across Bangladesh in 2010. Satirical images of the prophet Muhammad, along with some of the country's leaders, saw one man arrested and charged with "spreading malice and insulting the country's leaders". The ban lasted for an entire week while the images were removed.

Since then the Awami-League led government has directed a surveillance campaign at Facebook, and other social networking sites, looking for blasphemous posts.

In 2019, it was reported that 1500 Facebook accounts were shut down that were mostly fake, mocking the Bangladesh government, posting hateful comments and ‘perverted’ photos (Halim, 2019). What this shows is how Facebook has a fragile existence in some countries, but overall, the numbers of countries who have banned it long-term are minimal.

## **Facebook Terms of Service and Community Standards**

Facebook has a Terms of Service (TOS) and Community Standards document that controls the behaviours of those using the platform. A TOS can also be called a Terms of Use. Facebook uses TOS, and worldwide is a TOS is known as a legal term defined as (UpCounsel, 2019):

A terms of service agreement, also called terms and conditions or terms of use, is a document that covers a range of issues related to the behavior of a website or service user. The document includes items related to third-party websites, content ownership, copyright notices, payments, and additional information.

It binds the users to a code of conduct with consequences for violating them, as does Facebook’s Community Standards. Guidelines and terms are needed to control illegal, immoral, abusive and offensive behaviours. This section discusses aspects of these two Facebook documents that appear on the World Wide Web<sup>21</sup>. Also discussed is Facebook’s data policy<sup>22</sup>. This section is not comprehensive and it is advised to read Facebook’s documents online to see the large scope of topics it covers.

You may have if you are a frequent user of Facebook not even been aware of the large body of rules that guide using the platform. Yet concurrently, you may have been shocked to discover your data (what you post as content) is not private and is used in ways to target you especially through advertising. Cohen (2008, pp. 15-16), Jones and Soltren (2005) and Turov (2003) argue a common scenario is that those using social media platforms just want to start posting immediately they join and do not want to read policies because they are overwhelming and seen as time wasting:

Most people do not read academic and policy literature on social networking and privacy issues, and there is no guarantee that members will thoroughly read-or read at all-a terms of service agreement or privacy policy (Jones and Soltren 2005, 23). Even if members can interpret the legal jargon cluttering privacy policies of interactive websites, many people do not fully understand the legal implications of these documents. Most assume the mere inclusion of a privacy policy means that a site will not share information with other companies or websites (Turov 2003, cited in Chung and Grimes 2005, p. 533). As Jones and Soltren have proven, however, it may be possible to glean data on people’s habits, activities, and tastes.

Since Cohen published this in 2008, it has been proven to be correct that collecting data on Facebook users’ habits, activities and tastes for marketing and influencing opinions reasons has occurred. The TOS and Standards are now discussed, followed by an explanation of the



complications Facebook has in applying these standards that are not always consistently or fairly applied. Racism, sexism, homophobia and many other issues have given Facebook a negative public image as the platform struggles to keep up with worldwide demands for better security, privacy and punishments for those that break Facebook's Community Standards.

### The Terms of Service: Structure and Major Points

The TOS governs the use of Facebook and its products, features, apps, services, technologies and software that is offered except where it is expressly stated that separate terms apply (Facebook, n.d.f.). The TOS consists of five areas written in understandable terms that are used by the platform to protect users and guide user behaviour.

Table 1 is an overview of the five terms of service and most of their current meanings as at June 2020. It is advisable to check these as they may change in time. The information in this table is taken directly from the TOS (Facebook, n.d.f.):

Table 1

*Facebook Terms of Service - Five areas governing users' interactions with the platform*

<b>Term Name</b>	<b>Details</b>
<b>Our Services</b>	
	Facebook will provide a personalised experience for user
	Assists users to connect with people, groups and businesses
	Empowers users to "express themselves" and communicate about what they feel is important in their lives
	Discover content, products and services of interest
	Protect the Facebook community and manage harmful content
	Develop products that users can use safely in any geographical location
	Conduct research to make products better
	Provide a seamless and consistent Facebook experience
	Enable global access to services (depending on a country's Internet infrastructure)
<b>Data Policy and Privacy</b>	
	This relates to when a user will use the Facebook products, information must be presented about one's identity to Facebook

	Facebook will collect information about you that you need to give them such as name, location, age, gender and other details
	Facebook collects information about the people, Pages, accounts, hashtags and groups that you are connected to and how you interact with them across our Products, such as people you communicate with the most or groups that you are part of
	Information is collected about how Products are used such as content viewed or people you interact with
	Information is collected if a financial transaction is made between the user and Facebook; that is, if the user buys something from Facebook where a Product will cost money to use, including financial data such as credit card number
	Information can be collected about the device used to access Facebook, such as a smart phone or personal computer
	Advertisers, app developers and publishers can send us information through Facebook Business Tools that they use, including our social plugins (such as the Like button), Facebook Login, our APIs and SDKs, or the Facebook pixel. These partners provide information about your activities off Facebook - including information about your device, websites you visit, purchases you make, the ads you see and how you use their services - whether or not you have a Facebook account or are logged in to Facebook
	Facebook's data policy allows sharing of data to third parties, especially for targeted advertising, which has been a contentious issue
<b>Commitments to Facebook and the Community</b>	
	This determines who can use Facebook
	What can be shared and posted (done) on Facebook
	The user must give certain permissions as part of using the platform such as: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Use the content created and shared</li> <li>2. Permission to use your name, profile picture and information about your actions with ads and sponsored content</li> <li>3. Permission to update software that you use or download</li> </ol>

	Facebook places limits on using its intellectual property such as images (although many copyright free Facebook logo images are available hence their appearance in books and articles)
<b>Additional Provisions</b>	
	Terms of Use can be consistently updated
	Accounts can be suspended or terminated
	There are limits placed on the liability of Facebook for using Products, where the user cannot take action against the platform is something goes wrong with using Facebook
	There is a dispute clause where the consumer laws of the country you live in influence what can be done should you have any dispute with Facebook
	There is also a list of nine terms in this section covering a variety of situations including an important point about someone being able to take over your Facebook account to decide if it should become a legacy (memorial) account
<b>Other Terms and Policies that may apply to you</b>	
	<p>There is a comprehensive list of 11 policies that have individual links on the TOS page, some relevant to all users some not, which are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Community Standards</li> <li>2. Commercial Terms</li> <li>3. Advertising Policies</li> <li>4. Self-Serve Ad Terms</li> <li>5. Pages, Groups and Events Policy</li> <li>6. Facebook Platform Policy</li> <li>7. Developer Payment Terms</li> <li>8. Community Payment Terms</li> <li>9. Commerce Policies</li> <li>10. Facebook Brand Resources</li> <li>11. Music Guidelines</li> </ol>
	An extra area in Facebook's privacy statements is that the platform discloses that cookies <sup>23</sup> are used on the user's devices that they access Facebook from

As this table illustrates, these are the overall issues presented to potential users of Facebook. There are longer explanations on Facebook's pages about these issues and some variations to

these are made in certain countries. They may also change over time. What is in this table was last revised by Facebook on the 19<sup>th</sup> of April 2018.

## Community Standards

Facebook has developed a set of standards that determine the type of behaviours that users can do while using the platform. The rationale for this and the types of principles Facebook has in keeping people safe from online harm and continue to use it are (Facebook, n.d.h):

The goal of our Community Standards is to encourage expression and create a safe environment. We base our policies on input from our community and from experts in fields such as technology and public safety.

- Safety - Facebook removes content that encourages real-world harm
- Voice - Embracing diverse views
- Equity - Facebook has broad policies to accommodate many cultural views as possible

Table 2 presents the six standards and some of the features of those standards that determine if users can continue to use Facebook. This table has much of the content from the community page inserted into this table to show the types of situations which the platform tries to prevent occurring.

Table 2  
*Facebook's six Community Guideline Standards*

<b>Standard</b>	<b>Details</b>
<b>Violence and Criminal Behaviour</b>	<p>Aiming to prevent potential offline harm to users</p> <p>Removal of language that incites violence</p> <p>Organisations promoting hate and violence are removed, such as terrorist activity, human trafficking or organised crime</p> <p>The promotion and publicising of crime is removed</p> <p>In an effort to prevent and disrupt real-world harm, we prohibit people from facilitating or coordinating future criminal activity that is intended or likely to cause harm to people, businesses or animals</p> <p>Regulating goods such as not allowing drug, weapons and prescription medication to be actively offered and sold on Facebook</p>
<b>Safety</b>	<p>Content that encourages suicide or self-injury is removed</p> <p>Prohibits the publication of child nudity and exploitation, although some media outlets and special groups who are anti these have had</p>

	<p>such images posted which Facebook has allowed</p> <p>Sexual exploitation of adults</p> <p>Bullying and harassment</p> <p>Privacy violations and image privacy rights</p>
<b>Objectionable Content</b>	<p>Hate speech is prohibited, which Facebook views as a direct attack on people based on what we call protected characteristics – race, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, caste, sex, gender, gender identity and serious disease or disability</p> <p>Glorifying violence</p> <p>Adult nudity, although it is not uncommon to see shirtless males and sometimes females, and certain sexual activities</p> <p>Sexual solicitation between users</p> <p>Cruel and insensitive content, although it is subjective as to what constitutes this type of content that will be discussed in a later chapter</p>
<b>Integrity and Authenticity</b>	<p>Facebook tries to stop misrepresentation despite the millions of fake profiles that exist.</p> <p>False (also called fake) news reduction</p> <p>Memorialisation of people and pets</p> <p>Limiting Spam messages</p>
<b>Respecting Intellectual Property</b>	<p>Facebook takes intellectual property rights seriously and believes that they are important to promoting expression, creativity and innovation in our community. You own all of the content and information that you post on Facebook, and you control how it is shared through your privacy and application settings. However, before sharing content on Facebook, please make sure that you have the right to do so. We ask that you respect other people's copyrights, trademarks and other legal rights (Facebook, n.d.h)</p>


The main procedures for reporting violations of standards is contained as at June 2020 in the Facebook Help Centre (<https://www.facebook.com/help/181495968648557>). For example,

the procedure is listed below (Facebook, n.d.i), and Figure 34 shows the form that comes up where you can report a post, but you can also report profiles and other content:

To report a post:

- Click Story options in the top right of the post.
- Click Give feedback on this post.
- To give feedback, click the option that best describes how this post goes against our Community Standards. Click Send.
- Depending on your feedback, you may then be able to submit a report to Facebook. For some types of content, Facebook may ask you to submit a feedback report. This request appears after you press the send button on the report post, the feedback screen shown in Figure 34:

**Give feedback on this post** ×

 We use your feedback to help us learn when something isn't right.


Nudity Violence Harassment

Suicide or self-injury False news Spam

Unauthorised sales Hate speech Terrorism

Gross content  Something else

---

 If someone is in immediate danger, call the local emergency services. Don't wait.

**Send**

*Figure 34.* Form used to report violation of Facebook Community Standards

It is important to note that often some content you report is never removed. The inconsistencies in applying community standards has caused much debate and anger in the social media community.

## Facebook Jail as a Punishment and Deterrent - Definition and Controversies

One punishment given to users who violate any TOS or Community Standards has become a culturally loaded term. It is making a user's account impossible to access and post content on, a form of temporary banning called 'Facebook Jail'. A description by Skaf (n.d.) of it is:

Facebook Jail is when Facebook punish an account (profile or business page) - it could be that it blocks some features or disable the full account - because it breaks Facebook laws (post inappropriate content, post too fast, give too many likes, etc.).

The time in jail can range from 24 hours to a maximum of 28 days. Accounts can also be banned permanently, although a user can create a new email account to use to make a new Facebook account.

Figure 35 shows a message telling the user they temporarily cannot post content to their Facebook account:

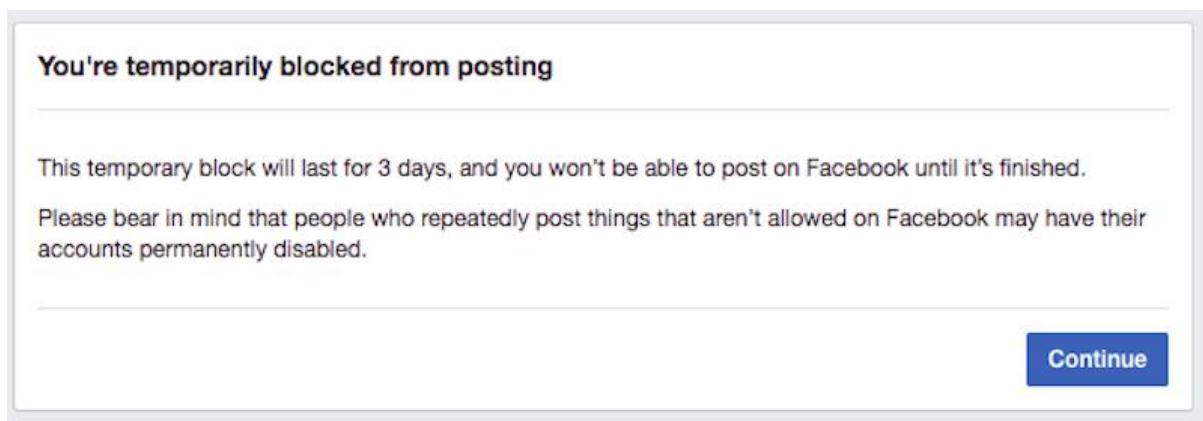


Figure 35. Temporary blocked from posting on Facebook (Johnstone, 2017)

If your account is permanently deleted Figure 36 shows a message that will appear and the user will not be able to use their account again:

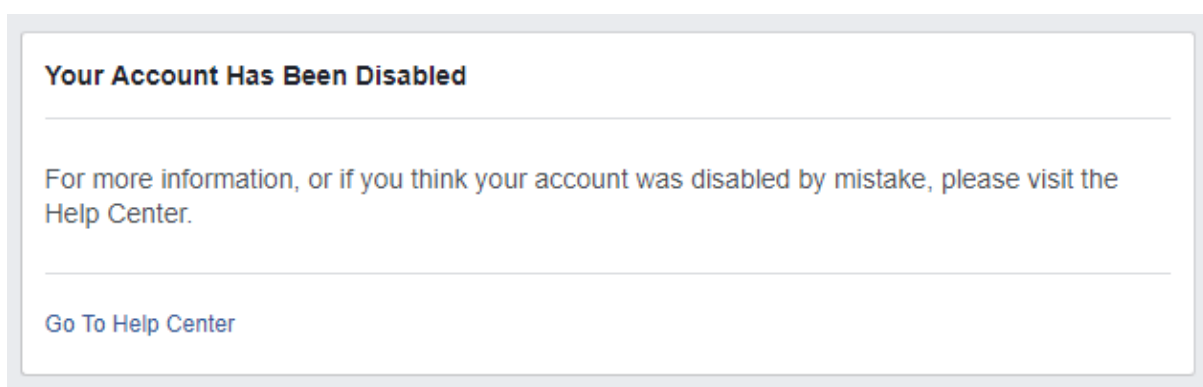


Figure 36. Message indicating use can no longer use Facebook account (Forney, 2019)

Facebook jail has become a controversial topic among users because many express that their punishments were unfair and violated their freedom of speech. It has also become the subject

of Internet memes as Figure 37 shows a meme<sup>24</sup> that mocks Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg as being unfair about the creation of Facebook jail:



Figure 37. Internet meme featuring Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg (jekaldefiler, n.d.)

There can be a number of types of violations that will get a user banned temporarily or have their account disabled. According to Green (2015) these violations can be:

- Fake profiles
- Hate speech and threats
- Impersonating another Facebook user
- Nudity
- Sending Spam<sup>25</sup> messages
- Sending too many messages to other users

Many users feel double standards apply to what can be removed off Facebook or get someone placed in Facebook jail. The context of banning is important to consider. What may be offensive in one culture or to a particular group is not to another. In the case of breast cancer posts that showed women's breasts, many users took copies of the posts before Facebook removed them. They then posted them on their own pages as a backlash to the decision that the photos were deemed by Facebook as nudity and pornography. Some users were placed in Facebook jail for doing this while others were not. Such double standards can be seen as unfair to users when banning is not applied consistently.

Facebook jai remains controversial for a lack of consistency in its decisions when banning someone, especially permanently. Users will also post their outrage elsewhere at their being banned. For example, Ungurean (2017) posted on Facebook criticisms of fact checking website Snopes<sup>26</sup> (<https://www.snopes.com>) which resulted in his ban. His upset was expressed on his blog:



I had only shared the article in three groups when <boom> a message appeared which said “You are not allowed to share in groups or join any new groups until October 12 at 11:24 am.”

But the difference between breaking a law in America, is that you are innocent until proven guilty. Also, we have a right to counsel for our defense. It’s a good system. It works well most of the time.

Facebook’s laws and how they deal with those whom they feel have transgressed their laws is really more like a dictatorship. I was judged and found guilty on the spot because of the words of my article.

Facebook jail will remain in place with no plans at the time of writing to stop banning users from the platform if they violate its community standards. What is important is to be aware of what can get you placed in Facebook jail and how to avoid it.

## **This Book’s Exploration of Facebook**

This book takes an exploratory approach to a selection of Facebook’s issues since its creation. It uses a variety of academic and anecdotal material to discuss issues that have had positive and controversial effects on the platform and its users. Despite these controversies, it remains a powerful cultural and technological entity. The underlying question of the book is, what are some issues that have shaped the use of Facebook and what are the positive and not so positive effects of these?

## **Chapter Contents**

This chapter was an introduction to Facebook, defining it, social media and social networking. The discussion of how to join and use it, while not covering all issues, gave an appreciation for the complexities of being a user and the various issues of privacy, friending and managing an account has. It stressed the importance of the user considering the various privacy, friending, blocking and other settings based on what they feel comfortable using. What countries Facebook is banned or restricted in was mentioned. Facebook Terms of Service and Community Standards were discussed as these underlie the topics that are explored in this book.

Chapter Two is a documented account of the history of Facebook from Mark Zuckerberg’s creation of The Facebook at Harvard to 2020. It will also briefly discuss two films, *The Social Network* movie of its early history and the documentary *The Cleaners* about those that view and regulate Facebook content, as both they have contributed to our knowledge of Facebook in popular cinematic culture.

Chapter Three examines the positive, helpful and beneficial side of Facebook. To illustrate these, three topics are discussed: Facebook’s use in education, Facebook friendships and the sharing of information and support in Facebook groups.

Chapter Four contrasts to Chapter Three as it examines the negative and undesirable aspects of Facebook. These have especially challenged Facebook’s reputation and caused many debates about how to manage them. This has also made it difficult to decide how the Facebook Community Standards should change as more distressing content occurs. These

are: trolling and cyberbullying on Facebook, Facebook addiction and the problem of live streaming videos in response to the Christchurch New Zealand 2019 shooting incident.

Chapter Five will examine in greater depth three Facebook controversies that were significant to damage Facebook's community reputation and trust. These are: unethical uses of algorithms, the Cambridge Analytica controversy and fake news. It considers the idea that perhaps we give away too much of our personal data that the platform needs resulting in undesirable outcomes, forcing us to re-evaluate if we should be using Facebook.

Chapter Six examines an important issue that has arisen because of the widespread use of Facebook; managing one's reputation and its effect on the ability to obtain employment. It will also look at cases of people who have had their employment terminated because of what they posted on Facebook. This is a divisive issue but increasingly employers and human relations (HR) departments use what is posted on social media to determine an applicant's cultural fit for the job. The chapter discusses some cases where employees took legal action to get recourse from employers. Included in this chapter is a reproduction of a 2015 study of Facebook by me to show why it is important to be aware what you post on Facebook can harm one's reputation.

Chapter Seven is the book's conclusion with a summary of the book and my thoughts on the book's issues and the future of Facebook.

## **Potentially Offensive Material in Book Alert**

Be advised that there is explicit language and photo images used in this book and descriptions of situations and events that may cause offence or distress. These include use of racist, sexist, homophobic, religious and culturally insensitive descriptions and other types of offensive statements.

## **Use of Public Facebook Content in this Book: Ethical Considerations**

In writing this book it is necessary to present content text and image examples from Facebook. This creates a problem because even with the user selection of privacy levels, it is assumed what you post is kept private. However, we see Facebook content posted on news websites or across various other parts of the Internet. It is also easy to copy and paste or take photos of posts from within Facebook. Zimmer (2010) wrote a substantive case study of the publication of private Facebook data, such as peoples' names, used in a study in a United States University that became public property. The students who gave their data were put at risk. The issue is that although this is the case, many scholars for over a decade have used Facebook data in their studies and in 2020 the issue of protecting people who may not give their consent to use their Facebook content data is still a problem.

This ethical issue of non-consensual data use for research purposes is covered by some suggestions that this book follows. These are suggested by the Association of Internet Researchers (2002) and researcher Madge (2007) as:

1. That there is no password required to access the site; Facebook content postings can be found by Google Image searching

2. No site policy specifically prohibits data on it for being used for research purposes

These suggestions were followed as best as possible. Some posts were gathered from within my Facebook but most sources are referenced. To reduce risk to the user who posts, their personal names do not appear in the text unless indicated otherwise. In some chapters the posts are public so names of those who posted do appear in the images.

It is conceded though that it is possible to find the user who made the post, but the posts appear as public posts that anyone on Facebook can see within the platform and can appear when doing a Google or other search engine search. Some Facebook posts and comments on Facebook were used with written permission by the person that is kept on file. At all times care and consideration before posting content has been done and who posted the data has been in most cases concealed.

## Notes

- 1 Quoted from Wise-Quote site <https://wise-quote.com/Mark-Zuckerberg-9442>
- 2 Quoted from an article by Evan Osnos in The New Yorker  
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/09/17/can-mark-zuckerberg-fix-facebook-before-it-breaks-democracy>
- 3 Quoted from an article by Bill Robertson (2017) in the Huffington Post  
[https://www.huffingtonpost.com/billrobinson/facebook-the-worlds-bigge\\_b\\_4585457.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/billrobinson/facebook-the-worlds-bigge_b_4585457.html)

- 4 An electronic bulletin board is defined by Soma, Smith and Sprague (1985) as:

The Electronic Bulletin Board System (BBS) is a computer software package that facilitates one method of networking. The BBS is used as a computerized information clearing house. BBSs allow users to send and receive messages concerning a variety of subjects from dog breeding, real estate listings, and computer programming tips to chess strategies and computer game participation.

To read more about this older technology, see Lunduke's (2017) explanation about them on the *Network World* website or a short, slightly poor quality, YouTube video called 'Connect: A look at the bulletin board systems' (dakroland, 2007).

- 5 As at 2020 MySpace still exists on the World Wide Web despite its market share being decimated by people switching to Facebook.
- 6 As at 2020 the two YouTube videos explaining the use of Facebook that were consulted for this chapter are:

Di Coke: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hjbRBd-HbYY>

Jeff Meland: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wkVf8BIE8rI>

- 7 See Walker for a simple explanation on changing gender options <https://www.lifewire.com/edit-gender-identity-status-on-facebook-2654421>
- 8 Doxing is defined by website HTML.com (2018) as:

The act of revealing identifying information about someone online - their real name, address, workplace, phone number, or other identifying information - is known as doxing (also spelled "doxxing"). The word evolved from the phrase "dropping dox;" hacker slang referring to documents that identify an anonymous person online.

- 9 Some image figures, such as the privacy options screen shot, are not referenced as they were obtained by screen shots on my own account, but do not show any personal details.
- 10 Constine's 2016 article posted on online technology site *TechCrunch.com* is a good guide to the technical features of the Facebook News Feed and goes into great depth to explain such topics as the News Feed algorithm and how what are to some annoying and unnecessary advertisements. The article is fairly comprehensive as a start to reading about the feed, but it is important to note that the News Feed has changed slightly since 2016 and change again further in 2019. Constine's article as at 2020 is located on the Web at <https://techcrunch.com/2016/09/06/ultimate-guide-to-the-news-feed/>

The Algorithm that Facebook uses to determine what stories appear in a user's news feed is called EdgeRank, developed by engineer Serkan Piantino. A brief introductory explanation with the mathematical symbols is provided at the web site <http://edgerank.net/> (EdgeRank, n.d.).

- 11 For a comprehensive list of options to organise friends see Facebook Help Centre online at <https://www.facebook.com/help/204604196335128/>
- 12 Trolling in the Facebook sense means receiving messages from another user or a group that bait, provoke, threaten, deceive or cause distress to the person reading them (Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017; Phillips, 2015; Bishop, 2012; Hardaker, 2010).
- 13 This figure is an example of a page I run on Facebook and is referenced in Works Cited. The page is viewable within Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/PhDProjectPreperation/>
- 14 This figure is an example of a group I run on Facebook and is referenced in Works Cited. The group is viewable, but not in full unless I add the person, within Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/AcademicCVResumeSupport/>
- 15 As at May 2020, the privacy settings that show how the public, closed and secret groups work, explaining that people not logged into Facebook can see names and descriptions of groups (Facebook, n.d.d.) can be found at [https://www.facebook.com/help/220336891328465?helpref=about\\_content](https://www.facebook.com/help/220336891328465?helpref=about_content)
- 16 Machiavellianism behaviours are named after Niccolò Machiavelli who lived during the Renaissance period which occurred in Europe between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries. He was said to have created a framework for unethical and competitive behaviour that has lasted until today. For example, a quote by him is (The Famous People, n.d.):

“Never attempt to win by force what can be won by deception.”

In terms of Facebook unfriending, Machiavellianism as a personality trait that may be the cause of being unfriended is explained by Harley Therapy (2015), a counselling blog, as:

Machiavellianism in psychology refers to a personality trait which sees a person so focused on their own interests they will manipulate, deceive, and exploit others to achieve their goals.

Facebook users will do such acts by posting public and private content that while not falling into the boundaries of trolling and cyberbullying, do cause distress. As this book will discuss, what is posted about you on Facebook, even if untrue or inaccurate, can be assumed to be true and affect your offline reputation and identity. People who engage in Machiavellianism may post content so convincing that it can influence decisions by others about engaging with you, on or offline. This is why it is best to unfriend those who are posting content about you that may be inaccurate, or take action by reporting them to Facebook, law enforcement if such statements are threatening, or in Australia the Office of the eSafety Commissioner at (<https://www.esafety.gov.au/>).

- 17 Narcissism is defined by the Mayo Clinic (2019) as follows, but it should be noted that it is often overused and misunderstood especially when applied to people you may meet only online:

Narcissistic personality disorder - one of several types of personality disorders - is a mental condition (sic) in which people have an inflated sense of their own importance, a deep need for excessive attention and admiration, troubled relationships, and a lack of empathy for others. But behind this mask of extreme confidence lies a fragile self-esteem that's vulnerable to the slightest criticism.

- 18 Although Wikipedia should be read with caution, the entry for Messaging apps at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messaging\\_apps](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messaging_apps) (n.d.) as at June 2020 is informative and goes into sufficient depth to explain what messaging is, the different types of messenger programs, and the features they offer.
- 19 The story of Facebook messenger and the controversies around it are out of the scope of this chapter, but are important to be aware of. It especially has not always been a secure platform for privacy and although you can block people from contacting you, abusive messages have been common experiences users have from known and unknown Facebook users. A comprehensive guide to the history, features and development of Facebook messenger is the Wikipedia entry at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook\\_Messenger](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook_Messenger)
- 20 Uber is a convenient, inexpensive and safe taxi service. Hire a private driver to pick you up & take you to your destination with the tap of a button on any smartphone device. A nearby driver often arrives to pick you up within minutes (Uberestimate, n.d.).
- 21 Facebook's Terms of Use can be found on the Web at <https://www.facebook.com/terms.php>

Facebook's Community Standards can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/>

- 22 Facebook's Data Policy document can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/about/privacy/update>
- 23 Cookies have long history of being controversial as tracking devices to show what websites you have visited. An official definition of a cookie is (PC Mag, 2019):

A small text file (up to 4KB) created by a website that is stored in the user's computer either temporarily for that session only or permanently on the hard disk (persistent cookie). Cookies provide a way for the website to recognize you and keep track of your preferences.

Facebook has a substantive explanation of cookies use, but makes this claim for using them (Facebook, n.d.g):

We use cookies if you have a Facebook account, use the Facebook Products, including our website and apps, or visit other websites and apps that use the Facebook Products (including the Like button or other Facebook Technologies). Cookies enable Facebook to offer the Facebook Products to you and to understand the information we receive about you, including information about your use of other websites and apps, whether or not you are registered or logged in.

- 24 An Internet meme is described by a user on the Turbo Future (2019) as:

An internet phenomenon or a meme is an image, video, phrase or simply an idea that spreads from one person to another seemingly for no logical reason at all. When people see a meme, no matter how silly it usually is, they find it amusing for one reason or other and forward it to their friends; soon millions of people know about it thanks to how fast the information can spread online and the viral effect.

- 25 Spam involves contacting people with unwanted content or requests. This includes sending bulk messages, excessively posting links or images to people's timelines and sending friend requests to people you don't know personally.

Spam is sometimes spread through clicking on bad links or installing malicious software. On other occasions, scammers gain access to people's Facebook accounts, which are then used to send out spam (Facebook, n.d.j).

- 26 The Snopes website was created as a response to the vast amount of fake news and misinformation posted on the Internet explained as (Snopes, 2019):

When misinformation obscures the truth and readers don't know what to trust, Snopes.com's fact checking and original, investigative reporting lights the way to evidence-based and contextualized analysis. We always document our sources so readers are empowered to do independent research and make up their own minds.

Snopes got its start in 1994, investigating urban legends, hoaxes, and folklore. Founder David Mikkelson, later joined by his wife, was publishing online before most

people were connected to the internet. As demand for reliable fact checks grew, so did Snopes. Now it's the oldest and largest fact-checking site online, widely regarded by journalists, folklorists, and readers as an invaluable research companion.



# CHAPTER TWO

## AN OVERVIEW OF FACEBOOK'S HISTORY, TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT AND CONTROVERSIES

When the site had launched in February of that year its creators “were hoping for maybe 400 or 500 people” to join, Zuckerberg said on “Bullseye,” but the social network had already reached 100,000 users in just a couple of months. - Quote from Tom Huddleston Jr. CNBC<sup>1</sup>

The Facebook was a stunningly simple product. “It was really just a directory,” recalled Meagan Marks, another Harvard student who became an early Facebook employee in 2006. “Before (October 2005), you could only even have one picture.” - Quote from Alexis Madrigal (2019) in *The Atlantic*<sup>2</sup>

But Zuckerberg needed help to grow his little social networking site that could. He would not stop until The Facebook had been installed on all university campuses in America. - Quote from Charlene Croft (2007)<sup>3</sup>

This chapter presents an overview of Facebook’s technical and cultural history from 2004 to 2020. The purpose of writing this, when there are many books, articles, websites and academic literature discussing its history, is to appreciate how large a platform it has become and how it came to be as such. As a disclaimer, not every incident, issue or technical development may be present in this chapter, but its aim is to inform about the rich history and controversial issues that have been a part of Facebook since its inception.

This account is based on researching a large range of material. The chapter will be chronologically based beginning at 2004 and ending at 2020. These are presented in three sets of time periods. While it concentrates on Facebook’s development and controversies that have been a part of its history, a brief discussion of the film *The Social Network* and the documentary *The Cleaners* is included to show how it has been portrayed in popular culture. For those interested in the academic research on Facebook, Wilson, Gosling and Graham’s (2012)<sup>4</sup> article *A Review of Facebook Research in the Social Sciences* gives a comprehensive overview of Facebook topics, and is worth consulting. This chapter will begin with a brief biography of its main creator, Mark Zuckerberg.

### **Mark Zuckerberg: A Brief Biography**

Mark Elliot Zuckerberg was born on the 14<sup>th</sup> of May 1984 in White Plains an inner suburb of New York City. His parents, Edward a dentist and Karen a psychiatrist, as well as his three sisters, moved to Dobbs Ferry also near New York where they went to school. One significant part of his childhood was his father taught him the BASIC computer programming language. This led to Zuckerberg learning software coding and building a form of a messenger service called ZuckNet where computers between the Zuckerberg’s house and business premises could communicate with each other.

Zuckerberg was considered academically gifted, winning prizes in science and classics<sup>5</sup>. Between 1998 and 2002 he further excelled in his academic work. He attended the public Ardsley High School in Ardsley New York. In 2000, he moved to the independent school

Phillips Exeter Academy in Exeter, New Hampshire. Although the student population is diverse with rich, middle and low income families enrolled there, it is a highly selective school. Zuckerberg also did well at that school, earning a place at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, staying at Kirkland House on campus. He majored in psychology and studied computer science courses. In 2004 he decided to leave Harvard to concentrate on the fast-growing Facebook platform. He was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Harvard in 2017. As at 2020 Zuckerberg is married to Priscilla Chan whom he met at Harvard in 2003 and has two children.

Before the creation of Facebook, Zuckerberg in 2003 built a prank web site called Facemash. This was controversial because it rated photos of women, often without their permission, as being hot or not. Harvard disciplined Zuckerberg and the site was removed. However, he saw an ongoing need for an online student communication connection platform. O'Brien (2010), quoting Zuckerberg's roommate and Facebook co-founder Chris Hughes, states the rationale behind creating it as:

“In general, in our room, we were always talking about what people were doing on the Web, what people needed to do to make their lives work better,” (Chris) Hughes said. “Mark was the coder of the group, and also really the driving force behind a lot of the brainstorming and conversation.”

In creating Facebook, then, Zuckerberg had hit on the school's weakness. Harvard does a lot of things. It churns students through lectures and labs. It launches curricular reviews and stem-cell initiatives; it raises money, and buys up property (or at least, it used to). But Harvard could not manufacture community. Facebook could.

The goal of Facebook was person-to-person connection, a main function of any virtual groupware system. Zuckerberg and his co-founders were able to achieve this and Facebook was on its way to becoming an online community well beyond what the Internet was offering before its creation.

Much has been written speculating on Zuckerberg's life. These include his own interviews that are numerous and his early life at Harvard depicted in the film *The Social Network*. His role in popular culture as a genius, an entrepreneur, a philanthropist and a business leader are the main traits he is known for. He is also seen as a villain and demonised by some. But what he created had a profound effect on society because not only did Facebook become a global social media platform but became ingrained into the daily habits of computer users. That is why many sites which may be better to use than Facebook for many reasons (For example MeWe <https://mewe.com/>) have not had the membership uptake Facebook has as it is still the 'go to' site many will use.

In 2010 Time Magazine, who in that year voted him Person of the Year, wrote about his motives for creating Facebook, suggesting something altruistic rather than profit driven about his desires to create the platform (Beahm, 2012, p. 135):

The idea that any of that is done for commercial reasons in order to take advantage of their opportunities to sell advertising, he considers insulting. This is the Zuckerberg people really need to understand, the guy who is doing it to change the world, not to make money...I don't think there's a company of its

scale that sees itself this way...There's no company of its scale that's run by a twenty-six-year-old who's doing it because he wants to change the world.



Figure 38. Mark Zuckerberg (privateidentity, 2009)

Quoted from Zuckerberg in *Billionaire boy: Mark Zuckerberg in his own words* (Beahm, 2012, p. 64):

*Facebook's Mission has evolved but never changed*

2004 - Thefacebook is an online directory that connects people through social networks at colleges.

2007 - Facebook is a social utility that connects you with the people around you.

2008 - Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life

2009 - Facebook gives people the power to share and make the world more open and connected.

2012 - Facebook's mission is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected.

- New York Observer, 12 July 2009

Some critics are not complimentary about Zuckerberg's time at Harvard and his character. A former advisor to Zuckerberg named Roger McNamee is highly critical of him calling him a hacker (McNamee, 2019, p. 141) and argues that Zuckerberg and others have too much of a centralised decision making structure that negatively affects Facebook's users (Bissell, 2019). Controversy has followed Zuckerberg's life that has ended up in the mass media and attracted severe criticism.

A positive trait he and Priscilla are known for is their philanthropic work in the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative organisation which began in 2015. Yet as this historical account suggests, he could be ruthless in business when called for. Some have praised his desire to keep Facebook as the world's most used social media platform and attempt to have an effective and safe online global community. The many biographies will usually attest to his dual nature as a leader and a person of a technology that has in humankind never existed as a dominant communication platform influencing so many to use it.

What now follows is a historically-based timeline of human and technical events that Zuckerberg was a part of.

**The**

## Beginnings, Fast Growth and Human Politics: 2004 - 2006

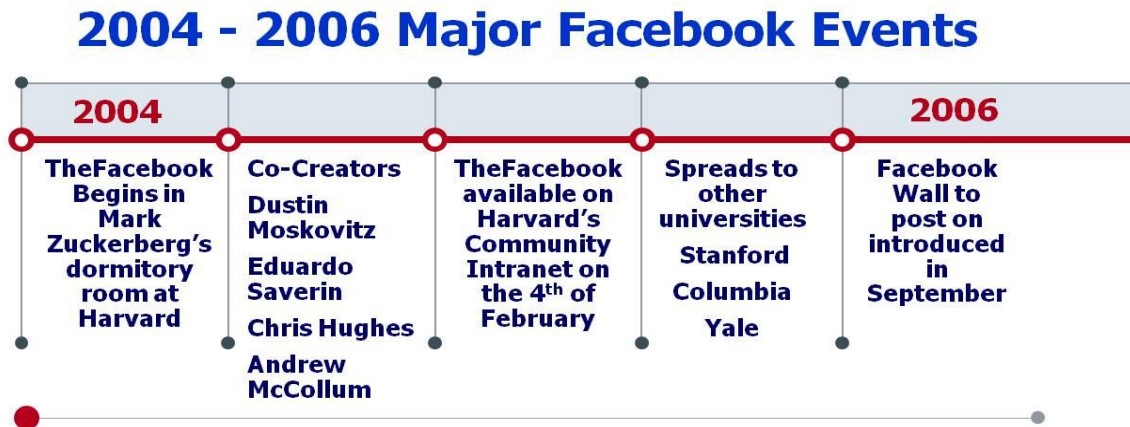


Figure 39. Major Facebook events 2004 to 2006

The year 2004 is considered the starting point of Facebook's creation. In between classes, Zuckerberg would sit in his dormitory room at Kirkland House in Harvard University and began making the foundations of Facebook. Those also involved in this process were classmates, Dustin Moskovitz, Eduardo Saverin, Andrew McCollum and Christopher Hughes:



Figure 40. Random photos of the five Facebook founders<sup>6</sup>

Although mentions of these founders appear in this chapter, explaining all the complex relationships, conflicts and legal issues are outside the scope of this book. It is recommended to initially consult these founders' Wikipedia pages being aware that those pages are not always accurate. As at 2020, the Wikipedia sites' web addresses are in the Notes and Works Cited sections<sup>7</sup> of this chapter.

This iteration of Facebook, known as Thefacebook was launched on Harvard University's community intranet on the 4<sup>th</sup> of February 2004. It initially acted like a company's intranet.<sup>8</sup> Users created a profile with one photo and other demographic information such as name, hometown, birthdate, residence, and gender (Larson & Vieregger, 2019, p. 98). The platform spread to other United States universities such as Columbia, Stanford and Yale and later

others. Figure 41 displays the interface that users had to register an account on and also log in:



Figure 41. Original interface design (Zsidó Kiválóságok Háza, n.d.)

The Facebook user interface<sup>9</sup> has been consistently dominated by the use of the colour blue on its website and phone app. The reason for the design using blue as the main colour is attributed to Zuckerberg being red-green colour-blind, so he can see blue best. He has stated “Blue is the richest color for me” (Widrich, 2019; Sutter, 2010). From 2004 to 2020 blue appeared on the opening log in interface and within the site. Figure 41 displays what became the well-known log in and registration that as at February 2020 is still seen:

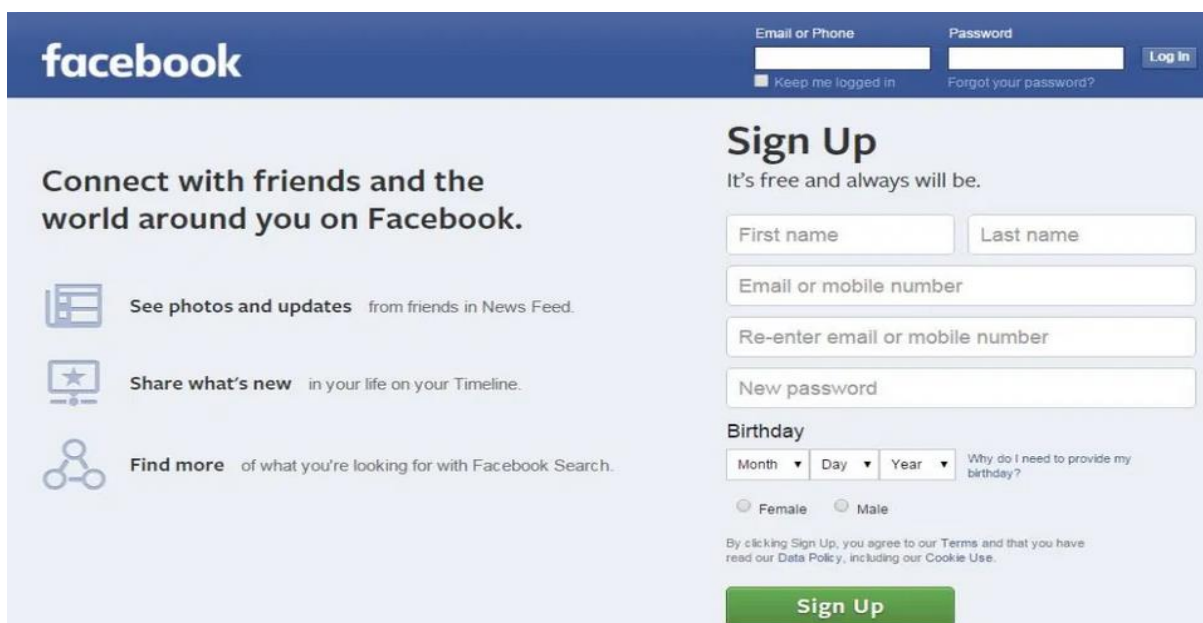


Figure 42. The Facebook blue interface (Hesahesa, 2016)

In September 2004 the Facebook Wall began. It was significant because it was where content, such as messages, were posted with the time and the date. As Zuckerberg felt more was needed, in 2007 attachments such as photos were added features which could now appear. The Facebook Wall ceased in December 2011 replace by what is now called the timeline where friends', groups and pages messages can appear.

Between 2004 and 2006 when it became obvious to Zuckerberg of the potential of TheFacebook becoming a global web-based platform, several significant events occurred. These would not only shape the platform and its future growth, but resulted in several significant financial and personnel events.

One was the creation of a Peer-to-Peer (P2P)<sup>10</sup> file sharing program called Wirehog<sup>11</sup>, created by Zuckerberg, McCollum (the Facebook founders) with Adam D'Angelo and Sean Parker. Parker was also a significant technology entrepreneur as he founded the controversial music file sharing site Napster<sup>12</sup> with Shawn Fanning<sup>13</sup>. Although Wirehog was abandoned in 2006, it did provide a way of sharing files that was, as Zuckerberg rationalised, part of friendships not actual file-sharing (Mello Jr, 2004). However, people not registered with Facebook could use it and with the controversies Napster had with file sharing it did not continue to operate.

Sean Parker in 2004 at age 24 became the first president of Facebook within five months of its creation. Although a short tenure, it was eventful and he has gone on to become a major technology entrepreneur, being involved in boards on companies like music streaming service Spotify and is a philanthropist with his own foundation. One intriguing reflection he has given on his time with Facebook was his responses to the idea that the social platform was made to be addictive to human beings (Sloane, 2017). In 2017 he was reported as stating Facebook had intentions of hooking in people as Allen (2017) states:

“When Facebook was getting going, I had these people who would come up to me and they would say, 'I'm not on social media.' And I would say, 'OK. You know, you will be.' And then they would say, 'No, no, no. I value my real-life interactions. I value the moment. I value presence. I value intimacy.' And I would say, ... 'We'll get you eventually.'” I don't know if I really understood the consequences of what I was saying, because (of) the unintended consequences of a network when it grows to a billion or 2 billion people and ... it literally changes your relationship with society, with each other ... It probably interferes with productivity in weird ways. God only knows what it's doing to our children's brains.”

“The thought process that went into building these applications, Facebook being the first of them, ... was all about: 'How do we consume as much of your time and conscious attention as possible?’” “And that means that we need to sort of give you a little dopamine hit every once in a while, because someone liked or commented on a photo or a post or whatever. And that's going to get you to contribute more content, and that's going to get you ... more likes and comments.” “It's a social-validation feedback loop ... exactly the kind of thing that a hacker like myself would come up with, because you're exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology.”

In this quote he admits to being a computer hacker, being caught at age 16 hacking into Fortune 500 companies. Overall, his involvement with Facebook was controversial in that once he was president and secured funding for it, Parker and one of PayPal's<sup>14</sup> founders Peter

Thiel began asserting their political power over Facebook's creators. Later in the chapter there will be a brief discussion of the Social Network movie, but this movie and the book *The Accidental Billionaires* suggest that both men influenced Zuckerberg to terminate his business and personal friendship with his Facebook founder colleague Eduardo Saverin.

Why this is important is how this split suggested Zuckerberg considered Facebook to be his own. With funding secured, Saverin was no longer required. In the Social Network movie, it is a pivotal point where Zuckerberg employs a degree of ruthlessness in the quest to make Facebook the world's number one social media platform. It is, however, not always clear from commentators how Saverin really felt about this, aside from some of his own words. For example, Saverin had wanted to complete his degree and do more work in academia. Yet in the film Saverin is visibly upset at being treated this way, and the dissolution of the friendship with Zuckerberg. Mezrich (2010, p. 230) described this interaction in *The Accidental Billionaires*, where in this extract Mezrich captures Saverin's hurt over what happened when he realised he was no longer part of Facebook:

....no longer part of the management team, no longer an employee-no longer connected in any way. He would be expunged from the corporate history.

To Mark Zuckerberg and Facebook, Eduardo Saverin no longer Existed.

Eduardo felt the walls closing in around him.

He had to get out of there.

Back to Harvard. Back to the campus, back home.

He could not believe what he was hearing. He could not believe the betrayal. But he had no choice, he was told. The decision had been made, he was told-made by Mark Zuckerberg, the found and CEO, and by the new president of Facebook.

Eduardo had one more thought as the horrible news washed over him.

Who the hell was the new president of Facebook?<sup>15</sup>

When he thought about it, he already knew the answer.

Saverin's termination is dramatically portrayed in this book and the Social Network Movie. Much speculation does exist if Saverin actually preferred to go back to academia. Why this was important was it set the tone for future conflicts Zuckerberg would have with many, including governments, other colleagues and investors such as the Winklevosses twins, Facebook users and the public.

In an analysis of the film, William Brown, a senior film lecturer and academic, gives a character assessment of Zuckerberg's portrayal in it. While Brown is concentrating on the film version of Zuckerberg, much speculation over the decades about Zuckerberg's character exists that suggests this may be an accurate assessment of him (Brown, 2013, p. 58):

Zuckerberg espouses a logic of individuality rather than collectivity, which is in turn tied to capitalism and exploitation, as Zuckerberg ends up betraying his

original business partner Eduardo, as well as the Winklevosses, in order to retain owner/authorship of the site. For Zuckerberg to be the sole author of Facebook is to discount (recognition for) the work of many others, as well as the way in which it is indeed the users that make the site what it is. And yet it is this goal of sole authorship that Zuckerberg relentlessly pursues and on which the film concentrates.

Understanding Zuckerberg's motivations and behaviours from the beginnings of Facebook give some idea to his character. They are subjective and often seen through the lens of others, especially in the media, through his official and unauthorised biographies and his former colleagues. What has been reported about him from the 2004 to 2006 era has though impacted on how people view him and it is reasonable to assert most of that has been a negative assessment of his character.

As this extract written in 2019 by The New York Times columnist Farhad Manjoo demonstrates, Zuckerberg still receives much commentary on his character. What Manjoo (2019) suggests is that Zuckerberg has achieved an American dream but as a villain who society cannot control:

In many ways he epitomizes the American dream: He turned a privileged upbringing into a life of super-extra-Bond-villain power and privilege by building a better, more capable version of a thing that many other people had thought of before he did. Then he bought up every competitor he could and copied the ones he couldn't.

He played the game very well, ruthlessly and with frequent flashes of genius, and even if he failed to anticipate nearly every problem with his technology, he managed to deliver fabulous results to shareholders. Now he possesses more power to shape commerce, democracy and the human psyche than anyone ever thought possible - at least according to his sometimes hyperbolic critics in media and politics, who, let's not forget, also have a lot to lose in his rise.

As a leader of what Zuckerberg recently called a "Fifth Estate alongside the other power structures of society," he possesses a new and unusual kind of leverage in the world, and none of us - not lawmakers, not the traditional media, not academics or tech companies - have figured out the best way to curb his role in society.

There's only one thing everyone seems to agree on, Zuckerberg included: that he is the epitome of having too much. To quote Kanye West, no one man should have all that power.

Therefore, although Zuckerberg's behaviours, such as firing a friend of his, can be judged harshly, there are obviously many dimensions to his character.

What this period of Facebook's rise shows is that with company growth comes the loss of idealism and political issues become part of success. In 2004 Facebook came to its largest milestone for a fledgling company; it achieved one million members. It needed to become a corporate entity, receive capital injections for growth and eventually move towards stock exchange listing. Before then some other noteworthy events occurred.



## Other Significant Events 2004 to 2006

### Facebook's Entry into the Corporate World

When Facebook attracted the attention of the public and financial investors, interest in its potential to become a dominant global platform attracted corporate interest. Two significant investments to increase Facebook's valuation occurred in 2005 and 2006:

1. In 2005 Accel Partners<sup>16</sup> a United States based venture capital<sup>17</sup> firm invested \$12.7 million dollars in return for a 15% stake in Facebook. It valued at that time Facebook to be \$500 million.
2. In 2006 another United States firm called Greylock Partners, who support entrepreneurs who are building disruptive, market-transforming consumer and enterprise software companies (Greylock Partners, n.d.), invested \$27.5 million dollars into Facebook in return for only a 1.5% stake. It boosted the value of Facebook to \$50 billion, a very large increase in a such a small time period.

A situation arose in August 2005 when Facebook wanted the domain name as www.facebook.com as it belonged to a company called About Face software<sup>18</sup>. Facebook paid About Face only \$200 000 for it.

In September 2006 search engine Yahoo offered Facebook \$1 billion dollars. However, Zuckerberg was subject to more acquisition offers before and after 2006, but was launching the news feed feature. For that he likely felt there was no need to sell to Yahoo or anyone else.

### New Territories and New Facebook Features

After 2005 more features were added and offered to Facebook users that increased the functionality of the platform. The pressure to offer Facebook to more people of all ages increased, with the company launching a high school version of it that had much the same level of functionality and features. It was still at that stage limited to university networks. In October 2005 Facebook began to operate increasingly outside its United States base with Cambridge, the University of the West of England and Oxford in the United Kingdom students offered memberships. It took until September 2006 for anyone over 13 years of age to join Facebook. Once this occurred Facebook was on its way to new territories and to move towards becoming a platform for potentially anyone on earth to use.

During this territorial expansion, new features from 2005 were being added: the news feed and tagging. Facebook News Feed came into existence in September 2006. It was considered a significant feature in Internet history for its organisational and layout functions, Twitter, another social media platform, had launched a similar news feed near the same time as Facebook did.

The Facebook News Feed is an important part of the platform's functionality. When a user logs onto Facebook it is what is seen first, as was explained in Chapter One<sup>19</sup>. To reiterate its purpose, the Facebook user sees on their news feed content controlled by an algorithm that factors in how many people are commenting on a certain piece of content, who posted it and what type of content it is (Techopedia, 2017). As a way of organising information, it has been useful but has not been without controversy both in layout and in content.

In October of 2006 the ability to post photos on Facebook was launched. This was a crucial turning point for Facebook, further enhanced by no restrictions put on how many could be uploaded and stored on the user's account. Photo posting shifted the platform from text to a visual medium, though the sharing of them was still not in place. Facebook moved quickly to remedy this as sharing is considered an important part of using the Internet. Moreau (2020) explained the history and operation of tagging:

In the beginning, Facebook tagging could only be done with photos. Today, however, you can incorporate tagging into virtually any type of Facebook post.

A tag is essentially a clickable name that appears in the caption of a photo. When you roll your cursor over the photo that has tagged users in it, you'll see those users' names appear over the photo (often over their faces).

This made a lot of sense back when it was exclusively meant for photos because anyone who uploaded photos could tag their friends who appeared in them to put a name to each face.

Tagging friends in photos typifies the social nature of Facebook. User controls were put in place to make tagging optional as some photos can be awkward or be seen by many. However, tagging posts and comments, which occurred in 2011, and sharing photos has been a major enticement to use Facebook.

Another feature was launched in August 2006 called Facebook Notes. This is a section on Facebook where notes about anything can be written, functioning also as a blogging feature. Figure 43 shows this interface that, as at July 2020, still exists:

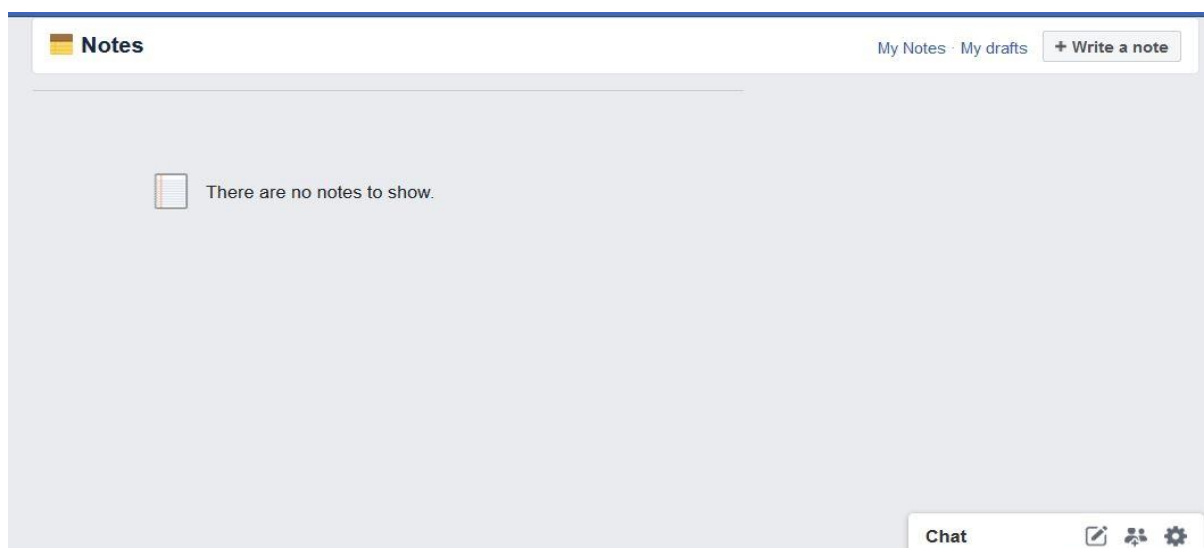


Figure 43. Facebook notes feature

More features with varying degree of success would be continuously introduced as Facebook grew in popularity. It is likely Zuckerberg was determined to make Facebook into an online experience, not just an information sharing platform. The next phase, the years 2007 to 2015, would be turbulent for Facebook's history.

## Turbulent Times and Growing Pains: 2007 - 2015

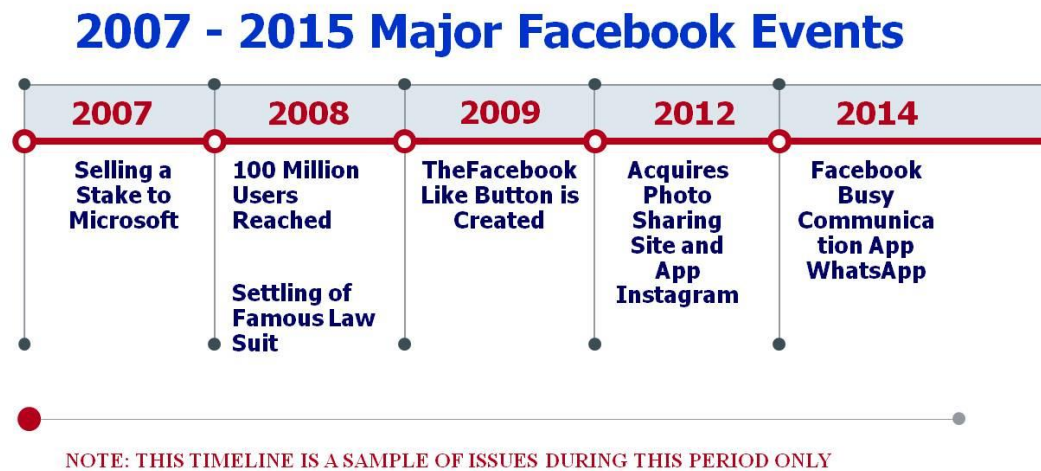


Figure 44. Major Facebook events 2007 to 2015

This section discusses eight dramatic years in Facebook's history as it moved further into the everyday lives of people. During this time new issues occurred challenging Facebook's operations and the platform. Increasingly, it became for people a feeling of pressure to use it. Technology companies became interested in sharing in Facebook's fortune. This section will discuss major issues and developments during this period. This section will illustrate how volatile this period of Facebook's history was.

### 2007 - Microsoft's Stake in Facebook

In October 2007, Bill Gate's software company Microsoft expressed interest in Facebook, who then sold a 1.6% stake in Facebook to them. The figure was \$240 Million US dollars. Microsoft's aim was to be the primary third-party advertising platform as the officially announced on the 24<sup>th</sup> of October (Microsoft, 2007):

Facebook and Microsoft Corp. today announced that the two companies would expand their advertising partnership and that Microsoft will take a \$240 million 1.6% equity stake in Facebook's next round of financing at a \$15 billion valuation. Under the expanded strategic alliance, Microsoft will be the exclusive third-party advertising platform partner for Facebook, and will begin to sell advertising for Facebook internationally in addition to the United States as this official press release announced (Microsoft, 2007):

Being the exclusive advertising platform in Facebook was not just occurring in the United States, but internationally. Such a move did not violate any United States anti Monopoly laws. Microsoft always wanted to strategically block Google from running advertisements on Facebook and vigorously competed with Google for the deal (Frommer & Molla, 2017).

This was not to last as Facebook in 2014 had grown to be worth \$200 Billion US dollars. In some ways there was a falling out between Facebook and Microsoft especially when

Facebook did not develop a smartphone app for Microsoft Windows platform, being as phone apps were becoming increasingly popular to use at that time (Rosoff, 2014). Microsoft decided to take its advertising platforms elsewhere so market share would not be lost, but as Rosoff (2014) reported, Facebook and Microsoft still partnered and co-operated with each other in other areas.

### **2008 - A Major User Milestone Occurs**

In August 2008 Facebook officially announced that the platform had reached 100 Million users worldwide. Facebook (n.d.k) announced it on their platform as:

We hit a big milestone today - 100 million people around the world are now using Facebook. This is a really gratifying moment for us because it means a lot that you have decided that Facebook is a good, trusted place for you to share your lives with your friends. So we just wanted to take this moment to say, "thanks."

We spend all our time here trying to build the best possible product that enables you to share and stay connected, so the fact that we're growing so quickly all over the world is very rewarding. Thanks for all your support and stay tuned for more great things in the future.

This proved that Facebook was not a passing novelty, but becoming a platform of choice with no real competitors at that stage to challenge it.

### **2010 - Development of the Location Feature**

In 2010 Facebook introduced a location feature that still exists as a check in feature. This shows people where you are. Internet privacy has always concerned people. Yet people embraced joining Internet sites and phone apps, often giving away private details. Google Maps<sup>20</sup>, launched in 2005, offers many features to find where people live. In 2009 the smart phone app Foursquare was launched. While this allowed people to find local places like restaurants, it also allowed people to display where they were located. A United Kingdom security firm conducted a survey of 50 former burglars who believed Foursquare and Google Maps assisted home break in crimes (Sterling, 2011).

In an article from CNN (Gross & Hanna, 2010), the Facebook location feature was explained just after its release:

Users who wish to announce their location to their friends on Facebook would tap a "check in" button to see a list of places nearby, and then choose the place that matches where they are.

"After checking in, your check-in will create a story in your friends' News Feeds [on Facebook] and show up in the Recent Activity section on the page for that place," Places product manager Michael Sharon wrote on Facebook's blog.

Facebook staff also said the feature will be useful not only to let friends know where they are, but also to learn if their friends are nearby at the same time, and to write down what they are doing at the location and what they think about it -

creating a trail allowing friends to see what the writer did there days or even years ago.

Figure 45 shows an example of a Facebook check in from the Facebook app:

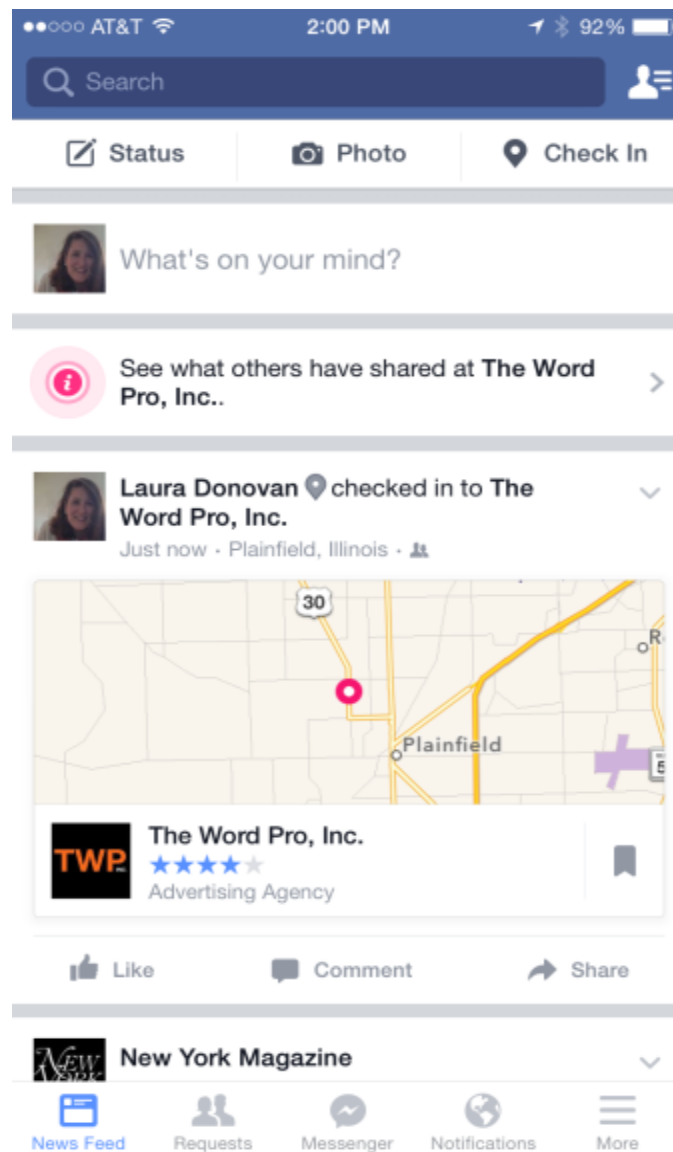


Figure 45. Facebook Check In (Donovan, 2016)

### Lawsuit 1: The Winklevoss Twins and Facebook's Famous Contentious Lawsuit

Facebook has been involved in several controversial legal cases and punitive financial damages actions across many countries. The well-known lawsuit that began early in Facebook's development was made by the twins Cameron and Tyler Winklevoss and Divya Narendra. A full background summary of the twins' lives can be read on Wikipedia<sup>21</sup> and on many World Wide Web sites. It was a contentious and long-drawn-out lawsuit. Although other court cases Facebook has been involved in will be mentioned in this book, the Winklevoss Twins legal challenge with Facebook is the focus in this section.

The twins are shown here in Figure 46 at the TechCrunch Disruption event in New York in 2015:



Figure 46. The Winklevoss Twins (Galai, 2015)

Both twins have become wealthy through their work in crypto currencies. Naresh (2020) writes an interesting observation of the twins as technological entrepreneurs that provides a background to the lawsuit:

Their stints at Harvard University and Oxford University were the years when they dabbled in internet entrepreneurship. They co-opted other students such as Divya Narendra, Sanjay MavinKurve, and finally Victor Gao, at different stages of the development of HarvardConnection. The turning point was in 2002 when they were prompted by Gao to work with Mark Zuckerberg. Working with him eventually led to the development of Facebook by Zuckerberg and finally ended with a settlement of approximately \$65 million in their favor in February 2008. They received \$20 million in cash and \$45 million in stock.

Table 3 draws on many sources to summarise the key events of this contentious lawsuit:

Table 3

*ConnectU<sup>22</sup> and Facebook's lawsuit: An overview of key events*

Time	Key Events
November 2003	The Winklevoss Twins and Divya Narendra approach Mark Zuckerberg to become a partner with them to programme the website. Zuckerberg was not to receive any financial compensation and it was reported he allegedly entered into an 'oral' contract to be a partner in the site (Bombardieri, 2004).
February 2004	Seeing an article in a Harvard student newspaper and frustrated at Zuckerberg's not finishing coding for the site, the HarvardConnection team send a cease and desist letter to him. The university president at that time advised the team to

	refer the matter to the United States judicial system.
May 2004	<p>HarvardConnection (ConnectU) officially launched in May 2004 as a social networking website despite issues the team were having with Zuckerberg.</p> <p>However, the lawsuit was filed that claimed Zuckerberg copied HarvardConnection's site using that site's source computer code and breaking the oral contact Zuckerberg had with the team.</p> <p>Concurrently, Zuckerberg filed a counter claim that was stated on the Justia (2020) site as:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Plaintiffs Facebook, Inc. and Mark Zuckerberg alleges that Defendants ConnectU, Inc., Cameron Winklevoss, Tyler Winklevoss, Divya Narendra, Pacific Northwest Software, Inc., Winston Williams, Wayne Change and David Gucwa circumvented the Terms of Use for the Facebook website by illicitly employing the user IDs and passwords of friends to mask Defendants' real identities, accessed the Facebook website to steal information and data for commercial purposes, and advertised to and solicited members to join <a href="http://www.connectu.com">www.connectu.com</a>.</p>
February 2008	After nearly four years Zuckerberg agrees to pay the team to end the lawsuit. The total was \$65 Million US Dollars, being a cash payment of \$20 and 1.253 Million shares in Facebook's stock. Part of this settlement was also that Facebook was to acquire ConnectU, which occurred in June 2008, for \$31 Million US Dollars.
May 2010	Over two years later Zuckerberg and Facebook are accused of securities fraud as the value of the stock that went to ConnectU was lower than expected and the settlement amount was down from \$65 to \$31 Million US Dollars. The settlement was therefore not finalised. The judge of the original case, it was claimed by The Winklevoss Twins and Narendra, acted improperly in the case.
December 2010	<p>The Winklevoss Twins and Narendra officially launch an appeal to address the securities fraud issue. Farrell (2010) stated the fraud was:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">The security fraud argument is that Facebook executives and lawyers presented the cash-and-stock offer's value as \$65 million, relying on a valuation of \$15 billion that Microsoft paid in 2007 when buying preferred shares in the company.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">But the settlement, however, was to be paid in common shares, not preferred shares.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Facebook had been valuing itself at 75 percent less for the purposes of calculating taxes on stock-based compensation which cut the settlement's offer roughly in half.</p>

April 2011	<p>A three-judge panel in a United States Appeals court made a ruling in favour of Facebook. The Winklevoss Twins and Narendra could not be released from their settlement with Facebook despite the accusations (Perez, 2011).</p> <p>The decision was published online with the last paragraph of the judgement summing up the appeal decision as (United States Courts for the Ninth Circuit, 2011, p. 4911-4912):</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">With the help of a team of lawyers and a financial advisor, they made a deal that appears quite favorable in light of recent market activity. See Geoffrey A. Fowler &amp; Liz Rappaport, Facebook Deal Raises \$1 Billion, Wall St. J., Jan. 22, 2011, at B4 (reporting that investors valued Facebook at \$50 billion FACEBOOK v. CONNECTU, INC. 4911 - 3.33 times the value the Winklevosses claim they thought Facebook's shares were worth at the mediation). For whatever reason, they now want to back out. Like the district court, we see no basis for allowing them to do so. At some point, litigation must come to an end. That point has now been reached.</p>
June 2011	<p>The Winklevoss Twins officially stated they would not take the lawsuit to the United States Supreme Court.</p>

O'Brien (2007), in a now ceased Harvard news publication, gave a succinct summary of the problem:

The similarities between Facebook and the concept for Harvard Connect are abundant and obvious, and the plaintiffs have accused Zuckerberg of stealing several ideas, including: the concept of an online social network for the college community; registration with .edu e-mail addresses to encourage users to enter accurate information into their profiles; grouping users by schools, starting with Harvard and then moving on to the rest of the Ivy League and beyond, and allowing them to connect to other groups; letting users adjust privacy settings within their groups; allowing users to request connections with other users; enabling people to upload, post, and share photos, videos, and information and exchange goods such as books or personal items

Zuckerberg considered the lawsuit to be a battle. Yet aside from taking many years to be resolved, it set a precedent for Facebook on how it would battle future lawsuits and other legal issues.

A comment mirroring researchers' and media commentators' views on the case, setting a standard that has followed Facebook in its controversies, is from Raynes-Goldie (2012, p. 89):

While the ConnectU case will likely never be conclusively resolved, it can be justifiably argued that the creation of Facemash is reflective of some questionable activities and attitudes, particularly concerning privacy and the respect of users. As I show in this thesis, Zuckerberg's activities before Facebook hint at the way in which Facebook Inc. would later conduct itself.



This case has been culturally and legally significant, but it showed that Facebook was not above the laws in the United States. Later though another significant lawsuit occurred that would again test Facebook's resolve.

### **Lawsuit 2: Facebook and Oculus Virtual Reality Code Copying 2014**

The second significant case Facebook was involved in was filed in the United States in 2014. The case's name is ZeniMax Media Inc. et al. v. Oculus VR, Inc. et al. pertaining to the Oculus Rift Virtual Reality Headset<sup>23</sup>. Figure 47 is an example of this headset released in 2016:



*Figure 47. The Oculus virtual reality headset (Pino, 2019)*

Virtual reality is an experience of presence, of being in an environment (Steuer, 1992) that is simulated with computer-generated images through the person using a headset (Greenbaum, 1992). Significant research and corporate money have gone into developing leisure and other uses for virtual reality, hence why the potential for its use was seen by Facebook in March 2014. Zuckerberg acquired Oculus VR, the company that had initially developed the Oculus Rift, for \$2 Billion United States Dollars.

A civil lawsuit was filed by ZeniMax Media, based in Maryland in the United States, against Oculus VR in an intellectual property and non-disclosure legal issue. They were not the only defendants. The others were: Facebook, Palmer Luckey, Brendan Iribe and John Carmack. Palmer Luckey founded Oculus VR, developing the headset display in 2012. John Carmack met Luckey and modified the headset prototype. Another point about Carmack is he created the video game Doom, using it to show off the headset at an expo in 2012.

Drawing on several sources, the following points outline the case. The reason why the case is important is, like The Winklevoss case, it involves contract breaching and misuse of intellectual property. However, both these cases do involve questioning the motives of

Facebook and its creators in their ethical conduct as business owners which would feature later in its future. These points showed how the case happened:

- In May 2014 after Facebook acquiring Oculus VR, ZeniMax formally filed a lawsuit in Texas seeking a full jury to hear the case.
- The suit was driven by this issue as explained by Gilbert (2017)<sup>24</sup>:

At the heart of the suit was the contention that John Carmack allegedly took company secrets with him when he left id Software (owned by ZeniMax) for Oculus (owned by Facebook). Before filing suit, ZeniMax lawyers contacted Oculus VR with those claims.

- Therefore, what the suit stated was that the computer code used to run the headset was copyrighted by ZeniMax and that trade secrets and virtual reality technologies that Carmack created were used by Luckey. This was important because ZeniMax contended there was a breach of contract, combined with copyright issues, leading to unfair competition and loss of potential earnings.
- In June 2014 Oculus VR formally stated that ZeniMax did in no way contribute anything of tangible merit to the headset. Oculus VR had photographic and other evidence to substantiate this claim.
- ZeniMax in August 2014 amended the lawsuit to include Facebook, which had to become a defendant in it. Oculus and Facebook failed to have the lawsuit dismissed, but it was a full year later in August 2015 that the judge allowed the case to go to a full jury trial in the United States District Court.
- Another year passed when a dramatic development occurred in August 2016. ZeniMax changed part of the lawsuit to formally include Carmack and Brendan Iribe of Oculus VR. Claims were made that Carmack deliberately copied documents when working at ZeniMax to an external USB drive. Iribe had told Oculus staff to say to the press that Luckey was the inventor of the Virtual Reality technology and code, when, it was alleged, he did not have the skills and ability to invent such technology.
- Getting Facebook involved, the case began in January 2017, a long time after the initial lawsuit filing. Zuckerberg called to give evidence in the trial. ZeniMax pursued its argument with the aim of obtaining \$2 Million US Dollars for damages and \$4 for punitive (as in punishing Oculus VR) damages.

After much time the jury deliberated the case finding in favour of ZeniMax. An amount of \$500 Million US Dollars was awarded to ZeniMax by the jury. The lawsuit finished in February 2017.

Despite the legal victory for ZeniMax, the court did not find Facebook and the others being sued guilty for every complaint against them. The following ruling was posted online showing how the court's judgement (Govinfo, 2018a):

(Ordered by Judge Ed Kinkeade on 6/27/2018) (ewd) Memorandum Opinion and Order: The Court has carefully considered the motions, the responses, the replies, the supporting appendices, the applicable law, and any relevant portions of the

record. The Court DENIES Plaintiffs' Renewed Motion for Judgment as a Matter of Law 994. The Court also DENIES Defendants' Amended Motion for Partial New Trial 1004. The Court GRANTS in part Defendants' Motion for Judgment as a Matter of Law 997 only as to Plaintiffs' false designation claims because the evidence establishing any damages and also the proximate cause of those damages as awarded by the jury is legally insufficient. The Court DENIES all other relief requested in Defendants' Motion for Judgment as a Matter of Law.

ZeniMax did prove some of its allegations in the case and was awarded payment for doing so. However, as this official transcript from Govinfo (2018b, p. 11) shows, the ruling did not totally go in ZeniMax's favour:

The jury found Oculus, Mr. Luckey, and Mr. Iribe liable for false designation by using Plaintiffs' marks without permission in at least one of these situations. Despite evidence of the unauthorized use of the marks, no evidence was presented that the unauthorized use of Plaintiffs' marks harmed or reduced Plaintiffs' reputation, resulted in lost profits for Plaintiffs or profits earned by Defendants, and certainly no evidence that any harm flowed from the unauthorized use of the marks.

This was not the end of the matter. In February 2017 ZeniMax filed an injunction that was to prevent sales of the Oculus headset. Oculus VR asked the court to reduce the payout figure. Judge Ed Kinkeade rejected this and reduced the settlement from \$500 Million to \$250 Million US Dollars. The case was finally settled in December 2018 although the amount was not publically disclosed.

This case is important because Facebook would become involved in many other legal cases as it grew. Facebook also made sure it had appropriate public relations mechanisms in place to show the public they were still an ethical company. It was considered that having the Oculus headset was Facebook's way of being forward thinking and investing in innovative technological ideas. Fogel, (2018) reported a statement by Facebook after the judgement which illustrates how Facebook shaped their point-of-view of the case:

"We've said from day one the ZeniMax case is deeply flawed, and today the court agreed," said Facebook vice president and deputy general counsel Paul Grewal in a statement. "Today's ruling slashed the verdict in half, granted our motion for sanctions, and fully denied ZeniMax's attempt to stop us from selling and marketing our products. This was a positive step toward a fair resolution, and we will be appealing the remaining claims.

Facebook's reputation was not substantially damaged by this case.

## **2009 - The Introduction of the Like Button**

In February 2009, Facebook introduced the Like Button. A definition of the button is that it is a feature allowing users to show support and appreciation for specific comments, pictures, wall posts, statuses, or fan pages without always leaving a comment (Rouse, n.d.). In the context of Facebook, a like is a noun, verb and adverb, which means it indicates enjoyment, agreement, interest or taking note of a Facebook post (Basalingappa, Subhas & Tapariya,

2016). This is why there may be a post on a controversial topic, such as bring back capital punishment, that has a like which is contextually different to liking a post on a photo of a car.

To illustrate an example of a like, Figure 48 shows the blue thumbs up symbol where someone has liked the Facebook post of Damon Art's drawing:



Figure 48. Example of likes on a Facebook post (Damon Art, 2020)

These likes developed into six emoticons which, as at 2020, are still present on Facebook. Figure 49 shows these six:



Figure 49. Six types of like buttons (Veszelszki, 2018)

Liking became popular and is considered a less of an effort form of communication than typing text as a response and a social cue sending a signal to the person who created the post

and the network of friends and followers (Scissors, Burke & Wengrovitz, 2016). Brandtzaeg and Haugstveit (2014) argue that likes became a means for people to inform the person or page owner what they perceive as desirable content to be posted. To clarify, likes can show a Facebook user how liked their post is for approval and solidarity, even if the person who posted shows no interest in the person who did the like. An example would be a musician with too many fans such as Taylor Swift or anyone who is using Facebook as mere promotion and information.

An issue arising with likes is that they have been associated with feelings of depression and low self-esteem. A study by Ozimek and Bierhoff (2019) using experiments suggested links between seeing what friends were doing and what posts were liked, with a lower sense of self-esteem. The comparison that your life is boring compared to others and feeling negative feelings about it has been widely reported. Numerous studies have measured and described the link between Facebook and depression, quantifying that this is a real phenomenon (Chow & Wan, 2017; Whitbourne, 2017).

The number of likes is counted and shown on a post. In view of this, Facebook conducted an experiment in Australia in September 2019 to remove the appearance of like counts on Facebook as previously done with the other social media platform Instagram. Constone (2019) observed that Facebook did this to minimise people feeling jealously and envy:

Without a big number on friends' posts that could make users feel insignificant, or a low number on their own posts announcing their poor reception, users might feel more carefree on Facebook. The removal could also reduce herd mentality, encouraging users to decide for themselves if they enjoyed a post rather than just blindly clicking to concur with everyone else.

However, this was abandoned and Facebook now lists the number of likes after the like button after all posts.

### **2011 - Facebook Timeline Launched**

The Facebook Timeline represented a significant change for users as it became the standard place on the platform for users to share posts, photos and video. It is also where the cover photo and photo of the person is placed. Personal information of the user's choice can be placed there and life events, check in's and memories are also posted on this timeline. If you are tagged in a photo it will appear in the timeline and friends can share posts directly on the timeline. It was introduced in September for individuals and later pages and groups. The user had no choice but to use it with every user having to do so by January 2012.

Messieh (2011) states the function of Facebook's Timeline is that it is similar to an online electronic diary for posting. As it is in a year, month and date format, it does conform to the idea of being a diary. The ability to scroll through pages was also a desirable feature, as was the ability to use the timeline search feature for finding past years' posts.

### **2011 - Growing Concerns over Facebook Privacy**

Facebook has been involved in many controversies over its use of user data and postings. As boyd (2008) argued Facebook privacy settings are flexible but confusing. In its early versions, such as the one Zuckerberg launched at Harvard in 2004, people who were not in

the network could not access Facebook and its users. You had to be a member see content. Facebook privacy issues is a large topic to discuss in terms of history. A concise history of Facebook privacy written in 2010 is contained in a research study by boyd and Hargittai (2010)<sup>25</sup> in the Internet journal *First Monday* that can be consulted to learn more about this issue.

A number of Internet researchers have studied Facebook's privacy policies since the platform's early versions. In a study reviewing social science Facebook research, Wilson, Gosling and Graham (2012, p. 215) incorporating others' views (Bilton, 2010; Fletcher, 2010; Richmond, 2010) illustrated the cycle of Facebook implementing privacy measures but users being unhappy with them:

In December 2009, Facebook unveiled a new 5,830-word privacy policy (Bilton, 2010). In addition to new detailed privacy controls, Facebook changed the privacy default setting to allow everyone, including non-Facebook members, the ability to view profile information, such as status updates, interests, and friends (Fletcher, 2010). The comprehensive change was lambasted by privacy advocates. Critics complained that the privacy policy was bewilderingly complicated, noting that a user must click through 50 privacy buttons and choose from 170 options in order to opt out of personal information disclosure (Bilton, 2010). In response to the growing public uproar, Facebook rolled out new, simplified privacy setting options in May 2010 (Richmond, 2010). With the new settings, users could choose one of four overarching options regarding the people with whom they wanted to share information: friends, friends of friends, everyone on the internet, or a "recommended" option that combines settings from the three previous options. In addition, users could still change specific privacy options or micromanage their privacy settings if they did not wish to choose one of the overarching options.

Facebook privacy has been negatively viewed as inefficient by many especially privacy advocates. Studies suggest people have a distrust of how Facebook protects user privacy. Raynes-Goldie's (2012, p. 105) states there is overall distrust and confusion with some or all of Facebook's privacy policies and settings:

Over the years, Facebook's formal privacy settings have grown increasingly complicated and confusing while at the same time generally reducing the control a user has over their information or identity... In their various incarnations since 2004, Facebook's privacy settings have given users some degree of control over how visible their profile is, primarily around what appears on their profile, when that profile in searches or how personal information is shared with Friends. Broadly, Facebook's privacy settings are entirely focused on the control of information with respect to other people (social privacy), while providing users no means to prevent information from being shared with Facebook Inc. (institutional privacy). As one of the participants told me in a privacy workshop I ran in 2010, "there is no setting on Facebook that prevents information from being shared with Facebook [the company]."

As stated previously, users disclose in their posts where they are located or the locations they have been, yet still express concerns about privacy. Social media influencer Craig Mack of

Sydney, Australia, expresses an alternative view that users have always had aspects of their privacy tracked or disclosed. As he states in a social media post (Mack, 2020)<sup>26</sup>:

If you're as super concerned about your privacy, data and facey collecting it as you say, I'm sure you've to been to facey's privacy centre, or community guidelines, or help centre (all easily at your fingertips on the app and on desktop) and taken a few minutes to understand how the data is used, what is made available and who it's accessible to.

You probably also went to the privacy settings on your page and updated them to what you feel comfortable with ages ago - and able to spot a half assed explained bit of hype that's trending.

The permission is designed for good - not misunderstood evil... it makes it much easier for orgs (organisations) like:

- international police to work with facey, goggle and others to identify, track, collect evidence, locate and capture people like pedo rings, sex traffickers, people smugglers and money launderers.

- And facey location data is more valuable to orgs like the RFS, than any imaginary spy, as it helps to identify high risk areas and plan resources that saves lives, properties, and minimise waste of resources.

Instead of just reactively freaking out and getting your "personally attacked by more secret moves from facey to steal my data and i do not consent" vibe on - maybe just take 15 / 20 min on facey and Google to do a quick search and read up on the topic to understand it, before riding the hype of a trending topic.

Therefore, there are alternative points of view that suggest the user has the responsibility for their privacy on Facebook and should be familiar with how to use it. Yet a counter argument is that Facebook has not always been concerned about this issue despite assurances from the company it does.

Facebook has needed to pay compensation for privacy issue violations. In 2011 Facebook moved its United States headquarters to 1 Hacker Way Menlo Park in California. While this took place the United States Federal Trade Commission (FTC) investigated Facebook for user privacy violation, after Facebook allowed auditors to review their privacy strategies. The FTC has the function of protecting American consumers' rights.

A large number of complaints were investigated which suggested deception was employed to confuse users. Some of these are (Federal Trade Commission, 2011):

- In December 2009, Facebook changed its website so certain information that users may have designated as private - such as their Friends List - was made public. They didn't warn users that this change was coming, or get their approval in advance.
- Facebook represented that third-party apps that users installed would have access only to user information that they needed to operate. In fact, the

apps could access nearly all of users' personal data - data the apps didn't need.

- Facebook told users they could restrict sharing of data to limited audiences - for example with “Friends Only.” In fact, selecting “Friends Only” did not prevent their information from being shared with third-party applications their friends used.
- Facebook promised users that it would not share their personal information with advertisers, but later it did.
- Facebook claimed that when users deactivated or deleted their accounts, their photos and videos would be inaccessible. But Facebook allowed access to the content, even after users had deactivated or deleted their accounts.

These breaches were considered significant and damaging to the trust users were developing in using Facebook. The result of finding Facebook guilty of breaches resulted in the platform having to pay a \$5 Billion US Dollars settlement. The Chairperson of the FTC at that time, Joe Simons, was quoted as saying (Coldewey & Lomas, 2019):

“Despite repeated promises to its billions of users worldwide that they could control how their personal information is shared, Facebook undermined consumers’ choices,” said FTC chairman, Joe Simons, in a statement. “The magnitude of the \$5 billion penalty and sweeping conduct relief are unprecedented in the history of the FTC. The relief is designed not only to punish future violations but, more importantly, to change Facebook’s entire privacy culture to decrease the likelihood of continued violations. The Commission takes consumer privacy seriously, and will enforce FTC orders to the fullest extent of the law.”

Zuckerberg has made statements about Facebook privacy over the years that have been treated with scepticism. An example of Facebook attempting to be transparent was creating an Off-Facebook Activity tracker that allows users to look at an itemised list of the websites, apps, and real-life stores Facebook knows that they visited, and lets them turn off that tracking (Holmes, 2020). Facebook (n.d.l.) has assured users as part of this tracking ability that they do not sell Facebook user information to anyone and prohibit a business or other type of organisation to share user’s sensitive data such as date or birth. Overall, the privacy issue in the context of Facebook’s history has not been overall positive for them. It still remains a contentious and debated issue.

## **2012 - Facebook Share Offerings**

Facebook became an incorporated company, Facebook Inc, in February 2012. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of May of that year Facebook offered an initial public share offering<sup>27</sup>. A decision was made to sell a 15% stake in Facebook at \$38 US dollars a share making it one of the most valued companies in history at \$104 Billion US Dollars despite concerns about how it would continue to make money in the future (Oran & Barr, 2012). Additionally, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of May, a decision was made to sell 25% more shares due to public demand.



Despite Zuckerberg celebrating the success of the initial public offering with a hackathon party, a series of issues caused investors to incur some losses. What this meant was the New York Stock Exchange (Nasdaq) and Facebook had 40 law suits against them for this event. Facebook defended this stating they did not violate any rules in the offering process (Tsukayama, 2012). Shareholders also felt Facebook had hidden information about its possible future growth (Stempel, 2018). Despite defending these accusations, Facebook eventually settled with the shareholders for \$35 Million US Dollars. A full analysis of the Facebook initial public offering can be read on Wikipedia<sup>28</sup>.

## **2012 - Purchasing Instagram and 2014 Purchasing WhatsApp**

Facebook has attempted to keep pace with mobile computing and changing user needs by buying other social media platforms and technologies. In 2012 Facebook purchased photo sharing phone app Instagram and in 2014 purchased messaging service WhatsApp despite Facebook having its own messenger service. In this section both apps are discussed to show that they are an important part of Facebook's stable of social media and communication platforms.

Instagram is a photo and video sharing platform launched in 2010 and created by Mike Krieger and Kevin Systrom in the United States. Drawing on a number of sources, a description of Instagram is (Stegner, 2019; Webwise.ie, n.d.; Wikipedia, n.d.):

- Allows photos and videos to be uploaded to a platform for private or public viewing
- These photos can be edited and one key feature of Instagram, which has been controversial for its ability to alter body size or change colours in photos, by a filter function
- The user is able to add tags (for example #Brisbane) and locations which users can use to locate specific photos
- Users can like photos and follow other users, but if the other user's account is private it must be requested to be allowed to join
- It allows connection to existing social networking profiles such as Facebook and Twitter, meaning users can share their pictures across all those platforms
- In 2013 it built in a feature to allow direct messaging with photo and video sharing between users that was replaced with a sophisticated feature called Instagram Stories in 2016 which does the same as previous but deleted images after 24 hours. However, the ability now exists for users to keep those stories

Figure 50 shows an example of the Instagram platform interface:

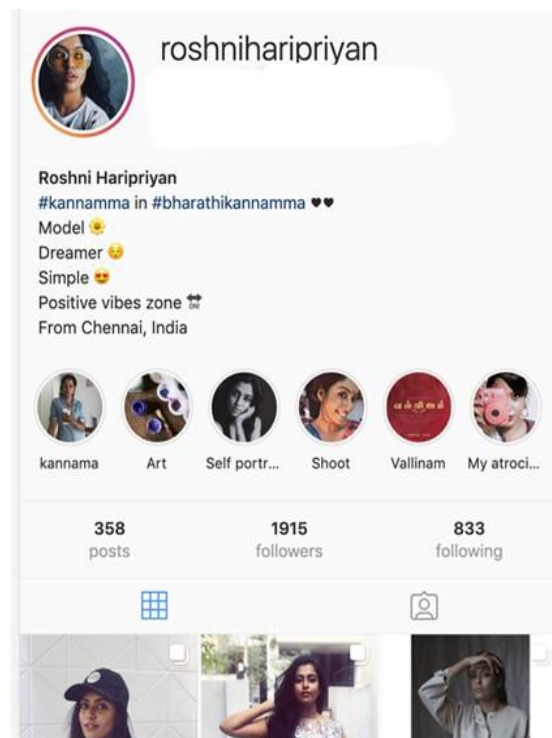


Figure 50. An example of Instagram's platform (Likecreeper, n.d.)

Instagram has reached, as at 2018, an estimated 1 billion active worldwide users (Mohsin, 2020). Clement (2020) claims on business data platform Statista that 35% of global Instagram users are 25 to 34 years old, hence the appeal of marketers including Facebook of targeting this age group. Facebook saw Instagram as a further way to maximise monetisation of their platforms by allowing third-party access to its data as well as advertising.

Larson and Vieregger (2019, p. 99) stated that critics wondered if Instagram was really worth the billion-dollar investment that Facebook made in 2011, but user growth and the successful addition of advertising to the platform silenced critics. Facebook made the correct business decision in buying Instagram, reaping many benefits.

Also considered a wise investment choice by Facebook was acquiring the text and voice message service WhatsApp, occurring in 2014. Created by Brian Acton and Jan Koum and released in 2009, its main functions are the ability to send text and voice messages, make voice and video calls, set up groups to communicate with multiple people and share files. The only requirement is that the user must have a mobile/cell phone number to use it. WhatsApp can also be used on laptops and personal computers, but is generally used as an app on smart phones.

Drawing on multiple sources (Dove, 2020; How Does WhatsApp Work, n.d.; Wikipedia, n.d.; WhatsApp, n.d.) a description of WhatsApp and its functions in 2020 is:

- Is a free app although there are data costs to use it
- Gives user a choice to make calls, send texts and share files

- Can create group conversations chatting and messaging with several people at one time
- Allows free international calls, a desirable feature in a messaging phone call platform
- WhatsApp has end-to-end privacy encryption to ensure user privacy

Figure 51 shows as at 2020 the chats screen and the WhatsApp symbol:



Figure 51. Example of WhatsApp chat and platform logo (Mills, 2019)

Facebook acquiring WhatsApp was seen as a good but calculated move with Zuckerberg took a personal interest in having the app. They acquired WhatsApp in February 2014 paying 19.3 Billion US Dollars. The claim has been made that in February of 2020 there were over 2 billion users worldwide, including being used by those in poorer and developing countries. Some countries, such as China, Iran and Sri Lanka for example, have temporarily banned the app, but often it still can be used in those countries.

Deutsch (2020) states the reason for Facebook's acquisition of WhatsApp:

WhatsApp is by far Facebook's largest acquisition and one of the biggest Silicon Valley has ever seen. It is over 20 times larger than Facebook's Instagram acquisition, which made quite the splash in 2012. That begs the \$22 billion question: why did Facebook break the bank to buy WhatsApp?

The answer is user growth. In 2014, over 500 million people used WhatsApp monthly and the service added more than 1 million users per day. 70% of WhatsApp users were active daily, compared to Facebook's 62%. Additionally, WhatsApp users sent 500 million pictures back and forth per day, about 150 million more than Facebook users.

By contrast, Warzel and Mac (2018) saw Zuckerberg acquiring WhatsApp was a necessary strategic move because it was a serious competitor to Facebook. The claim made by Warzel

and Mac was that Zuckerberg was carefully monitoring WhatsApp growth. Using a data analytics company app called Onavo, Zuckerberg is said to have been obsessive over the figures of WhatsApp in how much it was being used. WhatsApp was sending 8.2 billion messages a day compared to Facebook Messenger's (on mobile) 3.5 billion (Warzel & Mac, 2018). As they state:

WhatsApp's rise came at a crucial moment - just as Facebook was fully realizing its ambitions as a mobile-first company and making messaging a core service. WhatsApp was quickly demonstrating that it could compete with Facebook on its most important battleground.

Facebook has taken constant steps to remain competitive. In the case of WhatsApp, it demonstrated that Zuckerberg treated Facebook as a competitive corporation, not just a pet university project. He also committed to listening to users' needs and opinions. In a study of Zuckerberg's speeches, Hoffman, Proferes and Zimmer (2018, p. 211) state that Zuckerberg has always wanted to be seen as a person who listened to the masses as more controversies and platform improves that displeased users occurred:

Later, Zuckerberg writes, "We're going to continue to improve Facebook, and we want you to be part of that process. Test out the products and continue to provide us feedback" (ZF2006a). Here, Zuckerberg affirms Facebook's authority over its product, ultimately subjugating user voices to Facebook's iterative design processes.

This attitude would shape the next period of their history. Between 2007 and 2015, in the face of fast growth, Facebook had growing pains as it moved towards being a corporation. Turbulent times became common and criticisms of Facebook's features and conduct grew. It acted as a corporation as more pursuing of features, as shown with Instagram and WhatsApp, to keep ahead of competitors occurred. Vaidhyanathan (2018) sums up well the problem with Facebook; that it started out with good intentions, making our private lives more pleasurable. But instead, as Zuckerberg is quoted in Vaidhyanathan's book as stating, Facebook has become a victim of its own success. The next phase, the years 2016 to 2020, would further prove this to be accurate.

## Declining Facebook Use, User Trust Lost and Major Scandals: 2016 - 2020

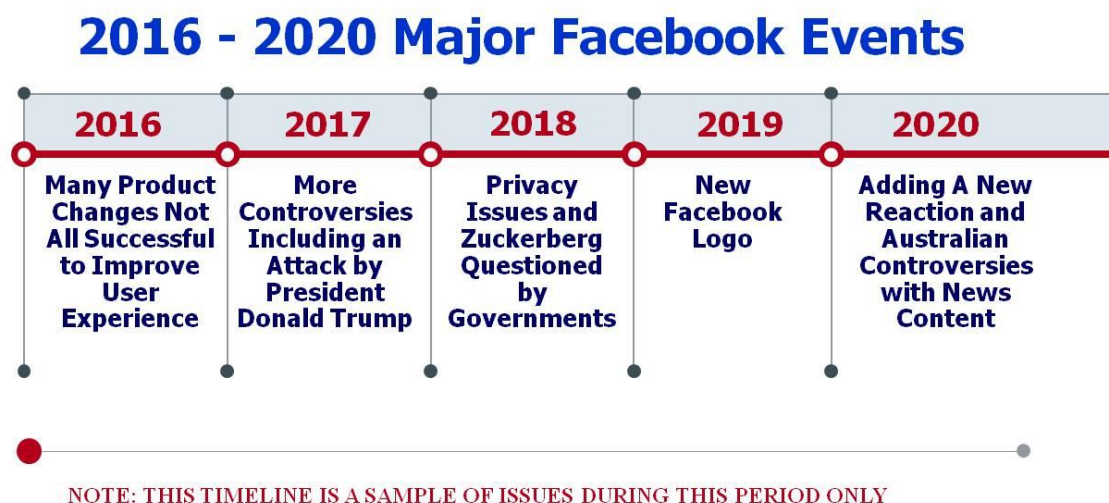


Figure 52. Major Facebook events 2016 to 2020

As Facebook user numbers grew, it faced further controversies over its conduct with users, the law and governments. Many groups and users began using Facebook to push their personal agendas and social causes. Civility, although the Internet has always been a place where people fight with each other, declined on Facebook. Products and improvements to the user experience were not always welcomed. It was, however, the debates over privacy, fake news, targeted advertising and what to censor that shaped much of Facebook's time between 2016 and 2020.

In this section, the history of Facebook covers these years and issues. However, in-depth discussions of Facebook Live's issues appear in Chapter Four and the Cambridge Analytica data scandal case appears in Chapter Five.

### 2016 - Facebook Live Feature: A Significant Development for Users

A popular part of the platform, Facebook Live uses a camera or webcam on a computer or mobile device to broadcast real-time video to it, with the broadcaster deciding who can see the video and engage with them (Bernazzani, 2019). The video can also remain permanently online if desired. As at 2020, to use it streaming third-party software such as XSplit needs to be used and many features, such as moderating comments or scheduling streams for a certain time, make Facebook Live popular to use (Facebook, n.d.m.).

Initially launched in August 2015, Facebook only allowed celebrities and selected others to use it. Once given to users globally in February 2016 it gained quick momentum and has become used for many purposes. Figure 53 shows an example of the live video being broadcast with Facebook users commenting on the side, although this example shows only one user making constant comments:

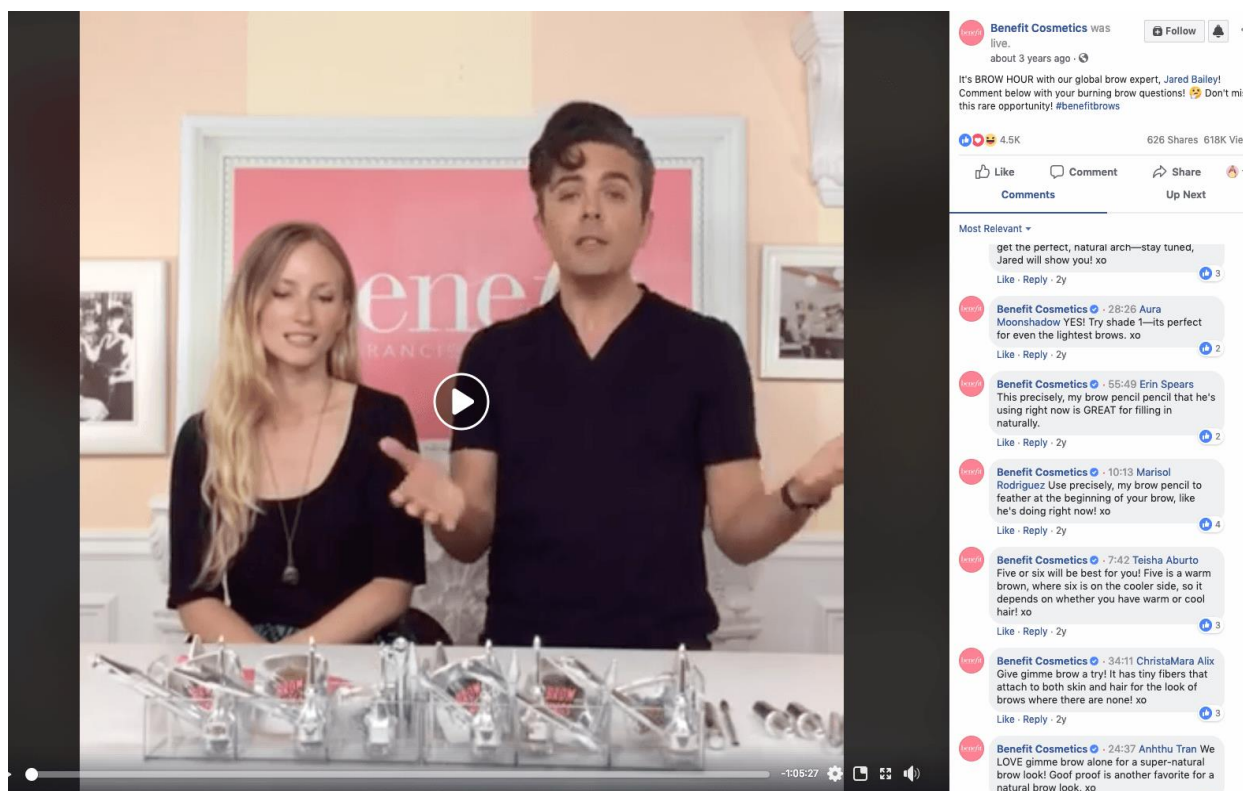


Figure 53. Facebook Live video and comments (Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism Advanced Media Institute, 2020)

Sheffield (2018, p. 99) states the functionality of Facebook Live, particularly in its ability to capture and broadcast events as they occur:

Making it possible for members of the public to broadcast live video with relative ease and without additional equipment, Facebook Live is a disruptive new technology; it has a far-reaching impact on the ways in which individuals and groups can communicate with one another and to the public. It allows citizen journalists, activists, and bystanders to record events as they unfold and broadcast them to a wide audience. For social movement participants, the technology not only captures collective actions in real time, but also helps activists share larger movement goals as a way to mobilize movement constituents and, ideally, convert bystanders to movement adherents.

However, in a study by Raman, Tyson and Sastry (2018) they claimed that engagement with Facebook Live (and other video social media software) happens after the live broadcast which brings into question if it is actually a 'live' platform.

There are two disadvantages to Facebook Live. The first is not knowing in advance what will be broadcasted, so possible disturbing and offensive broadcasts can be seen which are against community standards. Secondly, a reported dislike is that of rapid onscreen comments made during the broadcast, that are distracting, and the inability to adequately participate by posting a question. This was found by Haimson and Tang (2017, p. 56) as:

Others remarked on the overwhelming and unruly nature of comments on live streams, often expressing frustration that broadcasters would not get the chance to see or respond to their comment in the sea of text. Even if text overload could be decreased, the problem of which text should be displayed remains. Many interview participants remarked on the boring nature of some comments (e.g., “Hi from [location]!”). While mundane comments can be annoying for viewers, harassing or offensive comments are even worse. Particularly with political events or events celebrating marginalized identities, online harassment occurred...

Overall, despite controversies and technical shortcomings, Facebook Live has proven itself to be an excellent and welcomed addition in Facebook’s history.

## 2016 - Facebook News Feed Development Issues

When logging onto Facebook the first screen that appears is Facebook’s News Feed. A definition of it is given by Mashable (2015) that it is a digest (compilation or summary) of all activity happening across your account. Figure 54 shows an example of a news feed:

The image shows a screenshot of a Facebook news feed. On the left, there is a navigation menu with categories like FRIENDS, INTERESTS, EVENTS, FUNDRAISERS, and PAYMENTS. The main content area displays a 'Suggested Post' for IVY, which is a sponsored advertisement. The ad features a photo of a person water skiing and text promoting a summer camp. A red box surrounds the ad, and a red arrow points to it from the text 'an ad'. Below the ad is a post from August 25, 2009, with the text 'Had the best day ever yesterday!'. A red box surrounds this post, and a red arrow points to it from the text 'A friend's post'. On the right side of the feed, there are sections for TRENDING (with links to news articles), SPONSORED (with an Adobe Creative Cloud advertisement), and a language selection menu.

Figure 54. Facebook news feed example (Advertisemint, n.d.)

The Facebook news feed has had controversies and been intensely disliked by users. Facebook in 2015 started measuring the amount of time users spent viewing their news feed postings and items, including advertising. This involved changing the News Feed algorithm that took into account the time a user spent to read an article from Facebook. Prioritising content based on time spent was a major development by Facebook. It determined, potentially, what a user will see which may not be desired. An advantage of this has been the reduction in clickbait, which is content whose main purpose is to attract attention and encourage visitors to click on a link to a particular web page (Lexico, 2020).

Getting the news feed to please users is driven by the need to retain them using Facebook. Having extra, unwanted information in it can annoy users, although advertising and other clickbait can still filter into a user's News Feed. Facebook explained their reasons for changing the algorithm (Facebook, 2019):

Since 2016, we have used a strategy called “remove, reduce, and inform” to manage problematic content on Facebook. This involves removing content that violates our Community Standards, reducing the spread of problematic content that does not violate our standards, and informing people with additional information so they can choose what to click, read or share.

Our “reduce” work on Facebook is largely centered on News Feed and how we rank posts within it. When developing new “reduce” initiatives, we think about our goals in terms of the needs of three parties: people, publishers, and our community.

An example of what is termed clickbait is the use of exaggerated and sensationalised headlines. Thorn (2018) states this problem in the news feed as:

Ads that use exaggerated headlines and direct to landing pages that don't meet those expectations can be flagged for low-quality content. “Earn one million dollars in one day!” and “This will blow your mind!” are some examples that deliver false promises to the reader. Unless the following landing page aligns to the headline's claims, Facebook will either disapprove or reduce the distribution of this kind of ad in their auction.

Once certain headlines are classified as clickbait, they would not appear in the user's News Feed. This was met with various approval levels and some claims it was not working and clickbait and unwanted content still appeared in the News Feed.

Examining the News Feed development up to 2020, Facebook has had to refine how it would continue to do this yet still allow advertising so it could fund its free platform services. Although complex, mapping out this history shows key events used to do this as it continued to seek user feedback on the news feed experience and maintain quality control. The suggestion here is Facebook has consulted with users to improve the news feed. Yet it has had to consistently update its news feed algorithm to prevent fake news, clickbait links and spam<sup>29</sup>. Users have also reacted negatively to news feed developments with various privacy concerns (Hoadley, Xu, Lee & Rosson, 2010).

Table 4 lists a history of news feeds developments that illustrate the consistent changes that Facebook developers have undertaken to the its News Feed. It draws on several sources to



overview this issue (Cooper, 2020; Wallaroo, 2019; Blank & Xu, 2016; Isaac & Ember, 2016):

Table 4

*Facebook News Feed developments from 2016*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Facebook News Feed Development Milestones 2016-2019</b>
<b>2016</b>	Making content a priority, after extensive research and discussion pre 2016, begins.
	February update made to improve News Feed where Facebook gauges likelihood that users will rate posts and interact with them, making these posts appear at top of user's News Feed.
	Live videos also prioritised in feeds in March.
	Yet another update to the News Feed changes the prioritisation of what is seen at the top of the News Feed. Interacting with a post (liking, commenting, or sharing) is a good indicator for what users are interested in; however, it is not the only way of gauging interest. Users are less likely to interact with a sad news-related post or a serious current event, but that does not mean they do not want these stories in their News Feeds. Facebook will now measure the potential interest in a post based on the following criteria: user interest in the creator, post performance among other users, past content performance of the creator, type of post the user prefers, and how recent the post is. When you click on a post or link, Facebook will measure how much time you spend on post, even if you don't like, comment, or share (Wallaroo, 2019).
	Facebook begins to attempt to stop clickbait links.
	Facebook states that posts from friends and family will get top priority on users' News Feeds. After posts from friends and family, Facebook prioritizes posts that "inform" and posts that "entertain" (Wallaroo, 2019). This becomes known as the core values optimisation as these types of posts are seen as what users want to see first.
	In August the News Feed began to show fewer clickbait links.
	Significantly in November fake news sites are banned from Facebook and the News Feed.
	Facebook began in December placing messages at the top of the News Feed to encourage user engagement, such as sharing a holiday-themed card with friends and followers.
<b>2017</b>	Copying the app called Snapchat <sup>30</sup> Facebook stories could be created on the Facebook mobile app.
	Facebook 'buries' links to low-quality sites coming from posts and advertisements, again in an attempt to fight spam and clickbait.

	The Explore News Feed on the app fails because it meant users saw two separate feeds (Mosseri, 2018b).
	Trending news on Facebook gets own navigational list.
<b>2018</b>	Posts that receive comments are prioritised in what is called “meaningful interactions” (Cooper, 2020). This was considered a very important achievement in the News Feed’s development history.
	In October 2018 Facebook continued to improve the chances that users would not see less links to clickbait by eliminating links that disreputable web sites that had stolen or scraped content (Wallaroo, 2019).
	In a statement from Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook stated it will be demoting content that comes close, or “borderline,” to the policy line of prohibited content. For example, a post that may contain offensive speech but does not fall under hate speech will be demoted in distribution (Wallaroo, 2019).
<b>2019</b>	Facebook introduces “Click-Gap” which aims to stop fake news.
	In May 2019 Facebook made the News Feed highlight worthwhile and close friend content that also promotes links to content in which you have indicated you are most interested, based on previous engagement (Wallaroo, 2019).
	Facebook started downranking posts that contain misleading health information or dangerous, sensational “cures” (Wallaroo, 2019). In 2020 with the COVID-19 pandemic, this became a further priority for Facebook to stop the spread of misleading information.
	Text displays improved on mobile app to show three lines of text only.

To summarise the News Feed’s aims, Facebook wanted to make the user experience as pleasant as possible. Spam, fake news, clickbait and unwanted stories and advertisements are serious for many reasons, but also have the potential to influence people to stop using Facebook. The feed is the first screen seen and needs to be controlled according to the user’s wishes.

### **2016 - The Trending Topics Controversy**

The 2016 Trending Topics controversy was a widely publicised issue resulting in condemnation of Facebook’s business practices. In 2014 Facebook introduced a feature Twitter had called Trending Topics that showed a list of topics that were spiking or being posted about online (Cohen, 2014). This was in the form of a module that could be viewed on the right-side bar of the News Feed. In 2018 Facebook decided to remove this trending module from the right-side bar because users were found not to be interested in this feature, but also that there were claims of underrepresentation of certain groups and political parties, suggesting Facebook was giving favouritism to some but not others (Walker, 2019).

Figure 55 showed what the trending topics section looked like on Facebook:

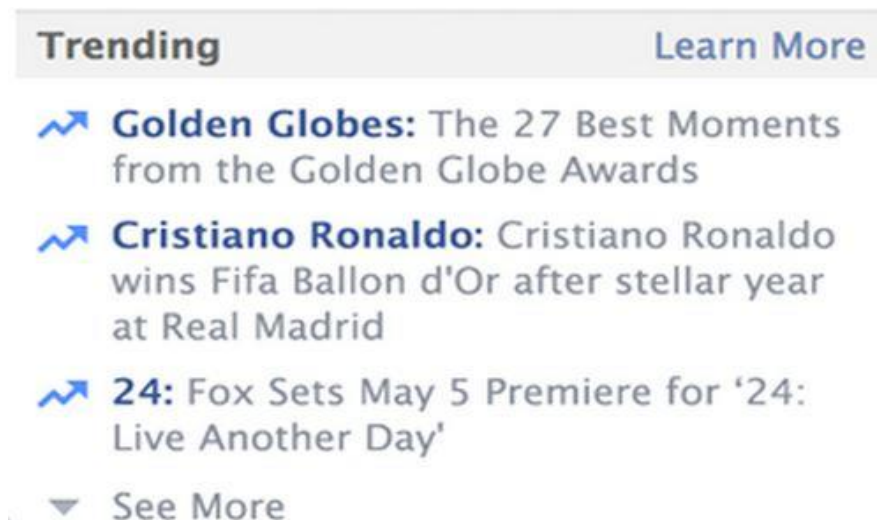


Figure 55. Facebook Trending Topics (Kastrenakes, 2018)

Gizmodo, a website that reports news about technology issues, began publishing articles about Facebook’s Trending Topics. Carlson (2018, p. 4) overviews the controversy as:

In May 2016, two stories on Facebook’s Trending Topics news feature appeared on the site Gizmodo, the first exposing the human curators working surreptitiously to select news and the second containing accusations that certain curators censored conservative voices. These revelations led to public outcry, mostly from conservatives upset at possible bias and journalists critical of Facebook for its largely secretive and haphazard approach to news.

These two stories posted on the Gizmodo website were written by Michael Nuñez. In May and November 2016, he made several claims about the practices of a work team within Facebook. The claims from these articles include (Nuñez, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c):

- Facebook workers in the trending news section were said to routinely suppress news stories about any conservative American politics and politicians so they did not appear in the trending section.
- This was seen as bias being exercised by those in Facebook, especially against conservatives especially in the United States.
- It was claimed by former Facebook news curators (their internal name) were instructed to artificially inject some stories in the trending section even if they were not actually trending online.
- Imposing human editorial values onto the lists of topics an algorithm spits out is by no means a bad thing but it is in stark contrast to the company's claims that the trending module simply lists “topics that have recently become popular on Facebook” (Nuñez, 2016a).
- Stories covered by conservative outlets (like Breitbart, Washington Examiner and Newsmax) that were trending enough to be picked up by Facebook's algorithm were

excluded unless mainstream sites like the New York Times, the BBC and CNN covered the same stories (Nuñez, 2016a).

- It was desired that Facebook looked like a place where people would talk about hard news.
- The United States Senate Commerce Committee - which has jurisdiction over media issues, consumer protection issues and internet communication - sent a letter to Mark Zuckerberg requesting answers to questions it has on its trending topics section a day after Nunez's article was published (Nuñez, 2016b)<sup>31</sup>.
- As a result of this in August 2016, Facebook announced that human curators will no longer write short descriptions that accompany trending topics on the site. Instead, the company will rely on an algorithmic process to “pull excerpts directly from stories”. The company also said it will stop using human curators to sort through the news (Nuñez, 2016c).

Cook (2018) revisited this issue as more details emerged after the investigations, continuing to state it was a scandal, with Cook describing how the whistle blower told how the news curators would suppress conservative stories from trending:

A former Facebook news curator, a self-described conservative, told Nuñez (anonymously) that curators would routinely “blacklist” stories that were actually organically trending on the social network but were generated by conservative news sources: “I’d come on shift and I’d discover that CPAC or Mitt Romney or Glenn Beck or popular conservative topics wouldn’t be trending because either the curator didn’t recognize the news topic or it was like they had a bias against Ted Cruz.”

Nuñez pressed the curator for evidence of the claim, and it turns out that the source kept contemporaneous notes of instances when a “conservative” topic was trending on Facebook but had been spiked. Nuñez reviewed them: “Among the deep-sixed or suppressed topics on the list: former IRS official Lois Lerner, who was accused by Republicans of inappropriately scrutinizing conservative groups; Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker; popular conservative news aggregator the Drudge Report; Chris Kyle, the former Navy SEAL who was murdered in 2013; and former Fox News contributor Steven Crowder.”

Why this was such a large issue for Facebook was the argument that bias was being exercised by Facebook that was discriminatory. Fitzpatrick (2016) explained the problem as this:

If Trending Topics was truly a list of what’s popular on Facebook, it would likely be little more than celebrity videos and reports of animals escaping from the zoo. That, of course, wouldn’t make Facebook look like a hard news destination. But having human curators separate the wheat from the chaff naturally introduces bias. Curation is simply bias in action.

Facebook, however, reacted quickly to address the Trending Topics issue. Colin Stretch of Facebook posted on May 23 a copy of a letter addressed to the Committee on Commerce,

Science, and Transportation of the United States Senate. Identifying many issues, the workplace culture of the team and its practices was addressed with Stretch (2016) saying an investigation of team and editing practices of the mostly contractor workforce took place. The letter published online set out the results of the investigation and how it would be addressed.<sup>32</sup>

The name of the informants who gave Nuñez the information about the practices of the Trending Topics team was eventually disclosed. Thompson and Vogelstein (2018)<sup>33</sup> wrote an account naming Nuñez's friend, Benjamin Fearnow, as the informant reporting to Nuñez. The writers praise Fearnow for his actions in disclosing the injection of stories and omission of conservative people groups and ideas news.

Why this controversy is important in Facebook's history is because it contradicted Facebook's idea that it be a platform of free speech and expression of many types of views. Also, at the time of this controversy, the fierce 2016 United States Presidential Election, which saw conservative Republican candidates win much of the election, was being contested. The United States moved towards a more conservative nation and perhaps those contractors at Facebook felt they were playing a part to help Hilary Clinton win, but this was not proved to be the case.

### **2016 - The Continued Financial Rise of Facebook**

Facebook continued its financial growth even with controversies and legal action occurring. The year 2016 was successful for it when in a press release on April 27 2016, Zuckerberg released an extensive first quarter report of the company's performance. This report showed how Facebook was rising in terms of users and also financially.

To demonstrate this success, a press release from Facebook Investor Relations (2016) highlighted the following from the first quarter of 2016:

- An increase of 1839 Million US Dollars in 2016 from 2015 to 5382 Million US Dollars
- An increase in earnings from shares from 42 to 77 cents per share from 2015
- Facebook's advertising revenue was 57% meaning it generated %5.2 Billion US Dollars, but also the growing mobile/smart phone advertising grew
- Daily and monthly active uses reached over 1 billion
- Increases in assets and asset values but a relatively small increase in 2016 in liabilities
- Dramatic cash flows to 6456 Million US Dollars doubling from 2419 in 2015
- Proposing a new class of stock where those who purchase shares do not have any voting rights in Facebook's annual shareholder meetings

Overall, these achievements suggested Facebook and Zuckerberg were growing the company which withstood scandal and controversy.

## 2016 - The Launch of Facebook Marketplace

Facebook Marketplace, created to compete with online buying companies like eBay, is a function allowing users to buy, sell, trade, exchange and barter over goods and services. It has strict protocols over what can be sold. For example, a firearms seller cannot sell a gun but can advertise that they sell gun and ammunition stock, but because checks cannot be done on the purchaser, an actual purchase of a gun cannot take place as at 2020 (Hardy, n.d.). Figure 56 shows an example of a user selling an armchair with a make an offer and contact seller function, as well as showing the area where the armchair is located, seen on the mobile Facebook app:

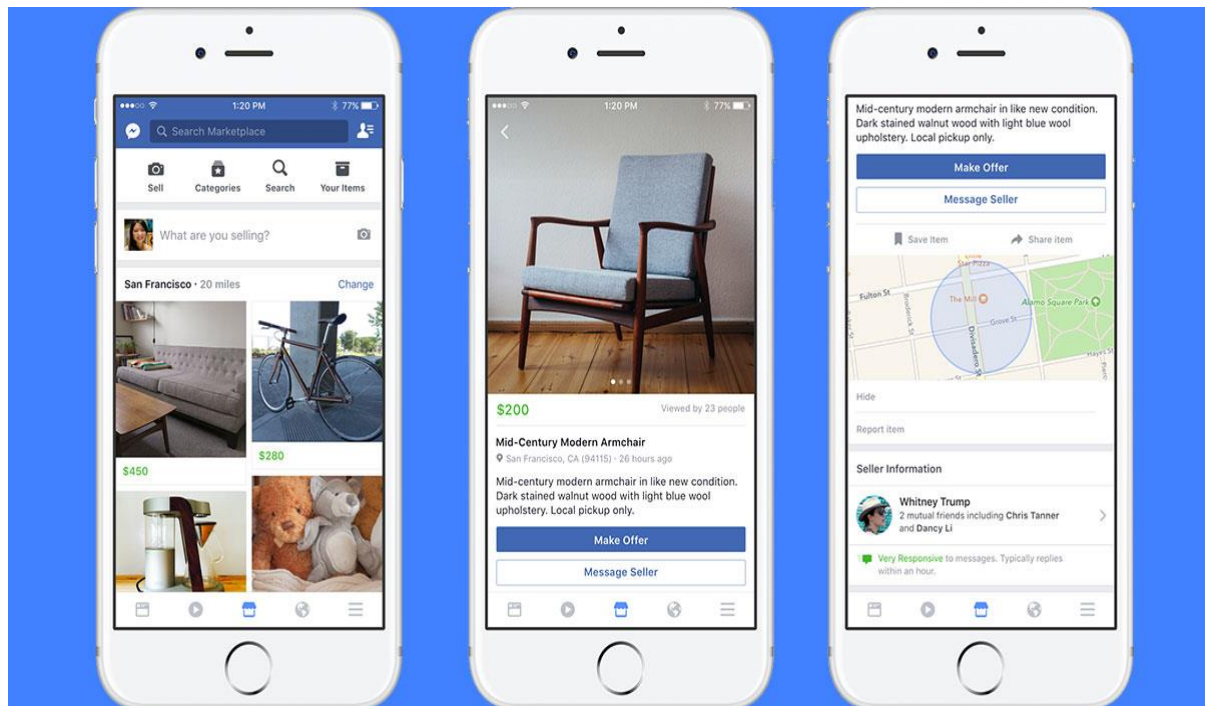


Figure 56. Example of Facebook Marketplace listing (French, 2019)

## 2017 - Launching Job Finding Service

Facebook launched a feature for users to search for jobs, but only in the United States and Canada. However, over time the practice has been to create Facebook pages and groups to advertise job vacancies.

## 2017 - The February Zuckerberg Building Global Community Manifesto

On February 16 2017 Zuckerberg released online his Building Global Community statement. His vision of Facebook is linked to community, but in this case moving the world towards a global community with Facebook supporting this. Despite the digital divide and banning of Facebook from many countries, Zuckerberg's idealism for a safe, supportive, informed and inclusive community the platform could support was considered the ideal tool to achieve this.

For many reasons, not everybody has access to Facebook especially poorer and developing countries. This makes it difficult to obtain information and build online communities. The term for this is the Digital Divide where there is a gap between a country's and its citizen's

opportunities to access and use the Internet to all exists (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2001). Zuckerberg's vision for Facebook was not possible for all to take advantage of. At the time of its release his speech was greeted with scepticism and criticism. The speech itself does, however, give a direction for the company and why it can be a platform that builds communities. For example, the first three paragraphs are reproduced here because they outline a grand vision and ideal for humanity (Facebook, 2017):

On our journey to connect the world, we often discuss products we're building and updates on our business. Today I want to focus on the most important question of all: are we building the world we all want?

History is the story of how we've learned to come together in ever greater numbers - from tribes to cities to nations. At each step, we built social infrastructure like communities, media and governments to empower us to achieve things we couldn't on our own.

Today we are close to taking our next step. Our greatest opportunities are now global - like spreading prosperity and freedom, promoting peace and understanding, lifting people out of poverty, and accelerating science. Our greatest challenges also need global responses - like ending terrorism, fighting climate change, and preventing pandemics. Progress now requires humanity coming together not just as cities or nations, but also as a global community.

This is especially important right now. Facebook stands for bringing us closer together and building a global community. When we began, this idea was not controversial. Every year, the world got more connected and this was seen as a positive trend. Yet now, across the world there are people left behind by globalization, and movements for withdrawing from global connection. There are questions about whether we can make a global community that works for everyone, and whether the path ahead is to connect more or reverse course.

Zuckerberg's aim was to develop a social infrastructure that gave power to people to build a global community that works for all humankind. Many virtual communities over the decades have tried to achieve this. Zuckerberg's vision is more grandiose and ambitious, as it assumes people will turn to Facebook as their preferred platform of use.

Immediately, analysis and criticism came from the media and academics. It was labelled a manifesto<sup>34</sup> by many commentators. The Guardian (2017a) newspaper stated Zuckerberg sounded like a politician while one of its reporters, Hern (2017), analysed the speech in much depth criticising selected sections of it. He especially speculates, as many have, that Zuckerberg will one day run for President of the United States (Hern, 2017).

It did not mean that everyone criticised Zuckerberg's speech as it was observed Facebook was being accountable to its users by this speech. Oremus (2017, p. 6) commented that the speech was too optimistic and especially that Facebook could not be everything to everybody always:

To be clear: Zuckerberg and Facebook thinking seriously about their impact on the world is a good thing. Technology is at its most dangerous when it is created thoughtlessly, for its own sake or for the sake of profit. It's at its most

manageable when its political agenda is transparent and explicit, because then it can be openly debated, supported, or opposed. Zuckerberg's manifesto makes it clear that he does care about Facebook's role in society. Yet as a statement of values, it is compromised by the undefined jargon, the unacknowledged conflicts, and the uncritical optimism about Facebook's ability to meet the needs and desires of all of its users at once.

Although welcomed, Zuckerberg's Building Global Community was seen with cynicism and met with criticism. It still demonstrated Zuckerberg's ideals for the future of the platform and hinted at the problems that would need to be addressed (fake news and inappropriate content) that have occurred.

## 2017 - Facebook's Censorship Practices Questioned

As Facebook reached 2 billion monthly active users, its role as a, mostly, place of free speech came into question. Although moderation of content and what could be posted has always been part of Facebook's Terms of Use, its huge global growth and cultural/societal differences of what constitutes offensive comment meant inconsistencies occurred, and still do. Hate speech, pornography, defamation and violent photos and videos are among the types of material that is reported to Facebook daily. What came into question were Facebook's censorship policies and why posts that did not meet the terms of use were allowed.

In 2017 the newspaper The Guardian (2017b) published on their news website *The Facebook Files*<sup>35</sup>. The argument from the newspaper was that Facebook was selective with the types of posts, photos and groups it removed from its platform. It can be argued with over a billion users that this task is difficult. However, the files brought about a discussion about how Facebook lacked transparency on its removal decisions. The files did publically disclose the guidelines for moderating content. An example was the moderation of comments and photos of sadistic<sup>36</sup> violence. Figures 57 and 58 show an example from The Guardian showing the difference between banning and allowing violent posts to be present on Facebook, that also highlight the subjectivity of what should or should not be removed (The Guardian 2017b):

## Graphic violence

### Examples: Sadism

- Enjoyment of suffering
  - *"I love how much she was hurt"*
  - *"I love seeing how much pain he's in"*
  - *"I love seeing animals suffer"*
- Enjoyment of humiliation
  - *"Make her wear the slut mark, I love to see her squirm"*
  - *"Parade him around and make him cry"*
  - *"That dog looks sad and defeated. I like it."*
- Erotic response to suffering
  - *"I'll store that for my wank bank"*
  - *"Makes me so wet to watch her burn"*

Figure 57. Sadism Facebook comments likely to be removed



## Graphic violence

### Examples: NOT Sadism

- Opinion on blame (for public figures only – for private individual see bullying)
  - *“He deserved what was coming”*
  - *“It’s his own fault”*
  - *“Using force was the only way to discipline that dog.”*
- Support for death penalty
  - *“Hang that son of a bitch”*
  - *“He bit small children. Had to put him down.”*
- Enjoying the “justice” when a violent sentence is carried out
  - *“Good to see that bastard hang”*
  - *“How else would you discipline your dog?”*

*Figure 58.* Sadism comments likely to be allowed on Facebook

What is drawn from these comments is, we may find the allowable comments offensive, but Facebook do not regard them as warranting removal. The context and meaning of words decide the censorship strategies Facebook will use.

However, Facebook has been criticised for inconsistencies because of the context in which a photo or comment is posted. A photo that is horrific or offensive in one post may appear in another post. Yet the context is taken into account which in turn justifies why it remains in one post but not another. In the Facebook Files, the moderation of terrorism images caused controversies. Figures 59 and 60 demonstrate this difference in images provided in the Facebook Files (The Guardian 2017b). In Figure 59 a set of photos depicting terrorist type images is deemed to be against guidelines and removed. Yet in Figure 60 the same images appear but Facebook users have added comments so they are not deleted:

## Symbols/Leaders: Primary Focus:

- Support, Praise or Representation: DELETE



Figure 59. Example photos of alleged terrorists and groups deleted from Facebook

## Symbols/Leaders: Primary Focus:

- Neutral Commentary: IGNORE



Figure 60. Once words are added Facebook will ignore them and allow their post

According to The Guardian (2017b), Facebook's policy on photos of alleged terrorists seems to be inconsistent and claim it is the words, not the images that usually mean removal:

The files seen by the Guardian show how moderators need to look at the captions as well as the images themselves. Often it is the words rather than the picture that will lead to a post being removed. We cannot show the most graphic images used to train moderators - but one shows a man shot in the head, lying in a pool of blood. This can be posted, as long as the caption with it is condemning, rather than celebratory.

Therefore, censorship on Facebook, exemplified by the Facebook Files, is a controversial issue.

Some issues warrant censorship and images, posts, groups and advertisements can be justifiably removed. Anti-vaccine material is often removed but not always banned. An ongoing issue for Facebook has been its balance of free speech and respecting history as seen in the way it manages World War Two Holocaust denial images and comments. In 2018 this issue became widely debated as people used Facebook to post content that denied this event happened. Memes, for example, were common with photos overlaid with text saying that the Holocaust never occurred. The problem was Zuckerberg, and at that time the Vice President for Facebook Global Policy Joel Kaplan, had a policy that Holocaust denial content was not always hate speech, therefore it was allowed to remain on Facebook. Greenblatt (2020), who stated Anti-Semitic content thrives on social media, viewed the platform's double standards as:

This, despite the controversy in 2018 after Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg suggested that Holocaust denial - while abhorrent to him - was nevertheless an opinion, not outright hate speech, and therefore not prohibited content. Facebook doubled down on this approach when, in announcing the change to its policy prohibiting white nationalism in March 2019, it reaffirmed that Holocaust denial was a form of misinformation.

Shamsian (2019) quoted Kaplan's response in a letter to Paul Packer, the Chairman of the US Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad on the Insider website as:

"[Facebook will] not remove lies or content that is inaccurate - whether it's denying the Holocaust, the Armenian massacre, or the fact that the Syrian government has killed hundreds of thousands of its own people," Kaplan wrote in a letter. "This is because we do believe that people should be able to say things on Facebook that are wrong or inaccurate, even when they are offensive."

Shamsian (2019) points out a contradiction that after the letter was published online Facebook banned high profile people who spread anti-Semitic content on the platform. Examples included: Alex Jones, Louis Farrakhan, Milo Yiannopoulos, Paul Joseph Watson, and Laura Loomer. Shamsian then further highlighted the double standards of censorship around this issue when stating famous Holocaust denier David Irving had groups and other content on the platform which has, as at time of writing and doing a personal Facebook search, not been removed.

Stjernfelt and Lauritzen (2020, p. 142) strongly argue that Facebook is crafting an image of being a censor, but that depends on many factors:

Thanks to the flagging system, Facebook's own removal reports may thus hide censorship and let the company off the hook. Evidence suggests that Facebook's current set of rules and statistics does not contain the whole truth. In many cases, the enforcement of the policy is not consistent with equality before the law - sometimes criticism of Islam is removed with greater enthusiasm than, for example, anti-Semitism or criticism of the state of Israel.

There are additional issues where censorship has been, in the media and public's view, applied inconsistently<sup>37</sup>. Drawing on a web search and Wikipedia, Table 5 lists the areas of censorship Facebook has been criticised for:

Table 5  
*Facebook Censorship Areas*

<b>Area of Censorship</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Blasphemy	Facebook censors much blasphemy (posting offensive and sacrilegious content) especially Pakistan.
Competitors	Facebook has blocked naming other social media platforms such as MeWe. Later in 2017 Facebook was exposed in the United Kingdom when Damian Collins released information on a court ruling where Facebook blocked a Twitter app called Vine from accessing Facebook data (Parliament UK, n.d.).
Conservative Views Censored	As discussed in the Trending Topics section, Facebook contractors accused of not posting political and other conservative views, especially in the United States, as trending news.
Editorial Content Censorship	In 2010 Facebook groups were removed that protested against the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong. This organisation is seen as supporting pro-China's Communist rulers (Lo, Hung & Loo, 2019). Censoring such content drew criticism with Facebook seen as interfering in people expressing their political views on the platform.
Germany's Anti-Refugee Hate Speech	The German government in 2016 placed pressure on social media companies to stop hate speech against refugees being posted online. An agreement was made to follow a code of conduct created by the European Commission to censor hate speech within 24 hours of posting. In 2015 it was stated that Facebook had only removed 39% of such material within 24 hours of being notified by Facebook users hate speech was present on the platform (Politico, n.d.).

Image Censorship	Facebook has always been criticised for the censorship of images. A well-known case of banning and then allowing an image was that of Phan Thị Kim Phúc OOnt, known as Napalm Girl <sup>38</sup> , whose photo was removed by Facebook because it was seen as child nudity. This image was of her burnt in an attack during the Vietnam War with her running naked along a road. The photo was reinstated after protest because the platform recognised “the history and global importance of this image in documenting a particular moment in time” (Al Jazeera, 2016).
Kashmir Issue	Between 2016 and 2017 the Kashmir Valley, located in the Indian Subcontinent, had months of violent protests. Facebook’s global content moderation team, led by policy head Monika Bikert, deleted swathes of posts that apparently violated the company’s community standards, handing out temporary account bans and restricting the reach of certain Facebook communities, which was described as a form of bullying censorship (Srivastava, 2016).
Moskal	<p>Krishnappa (2019a) describes this censorship issue as:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">In 2015, Facebook started automatically banning accounts that used the word “moskal” - a widely used historical slang term for people of Russian, which could be considered offensive by some individuals. However, use of similar words such as “khokhol”, which are widely used by Russian nationalists against Ukrainians, as well as insulting uses of “ukrop”, were not prosecuted simultaneously. When a conflict between Russia and Ukraine broke out in 2014, people in both countries started reporting the terms used by the opposing side as hate speech.</p>
Not Allowing Content that Criticises Facebook on the Platform	Facebook has been accused of this practice, with an example occurring in 2016. Israeli creative group Mizbala criticised Facebook and their Facebook posts disappeared (Yaron, 2016).

The conclusion is that not all removal of content is undesirable and Facebook is inconsistent in its decisions to remove content or allow it to remain on the platform. Leaving some hate speech on the platform serves to educate people to what such speech is. Yet Facebook has been seen to be too fastidious and reactionary in removing content that had a context that was not harmful at all. This was especially so in the case of showing women’s breasts in breast cancer posts. Having a global platform with many users of different cultural, religious and morality beliefs inevitably means conflicts over content type and demands for removal will be different.

By contrast, Jackson (2014) states, censorship can act as a desirable and protective mechanism in cases such as: preventing criminals contacting their victims, removing pornography, preventing computer hacking, complying with trademarks and copyright or anything that is inflammatory and promotes violence against others. However, this is also subjective and Facebook censorship will remain a contested and argued issue, not being able to keep up with constant relentless daily user posting.

### 2018, 2019 and 2020 - Repeated and Deepening Issues for Facebook

This period of Facebook's history is shaped by repeated and deepening issue as it began to compete with other social media networks taking market share. Declining use of Facebook was not dramatic, but still concerning. Zuckerberg tried to address issues that arose but found himself accountable to governments and the law. Facebook also tried to be a global community and everything to everyone, but criticisms from the media and researchers suggested Facebook had personal and social consequences that did not benefit the individual. Key events from 2018 to 2020 will be examined in this section.

### Declining Use of Facebook

Investigating Facebook's decline of use is difficult. There is no definitive or comprehensive large data set in existence asking millions of users why they have stopped using it. Studies can only sample as many users as feasible for the particular study. Much speculation of a decline in use is driven by media reporting and opinion through anecdotal evidence. People may get bored by using the same platform and become dissatisfied by what they see on it or start using other social media. Various corporate and academic studies show why this is occurring, though their sample sizes are often localised and small in comparison to the millions who use Facebook.

In 2018 Australian Communications Company Yellow conducted an Australia only survey on the use of social media. Although it was a small user response rate to the survey<sup>39</sup>, the study suggested what social media platforms are being used less (Figure 61) and reasons why (Figure 62):

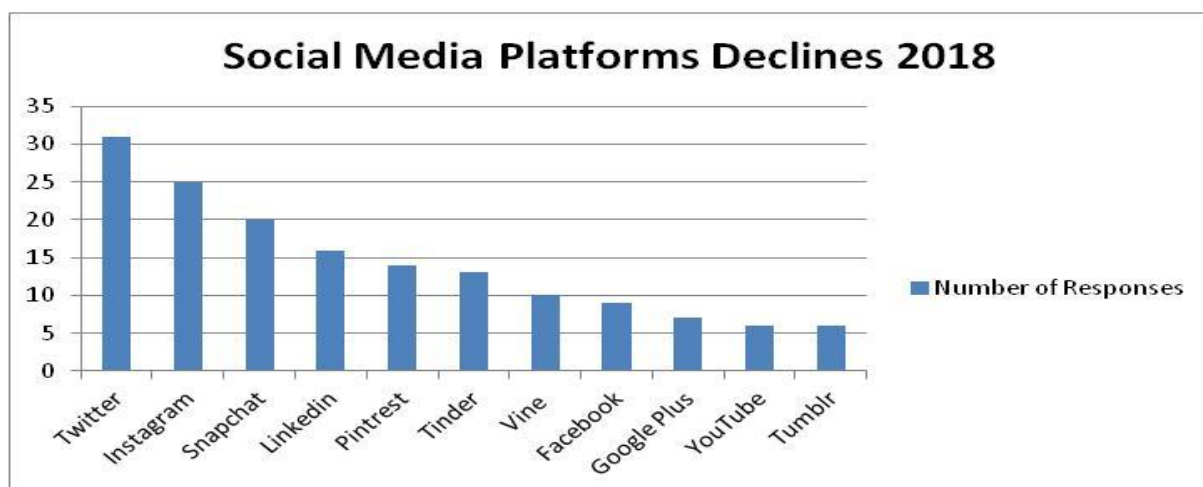


Figure 61. Decline of social media platforms in Australia (Yellow, 2018)

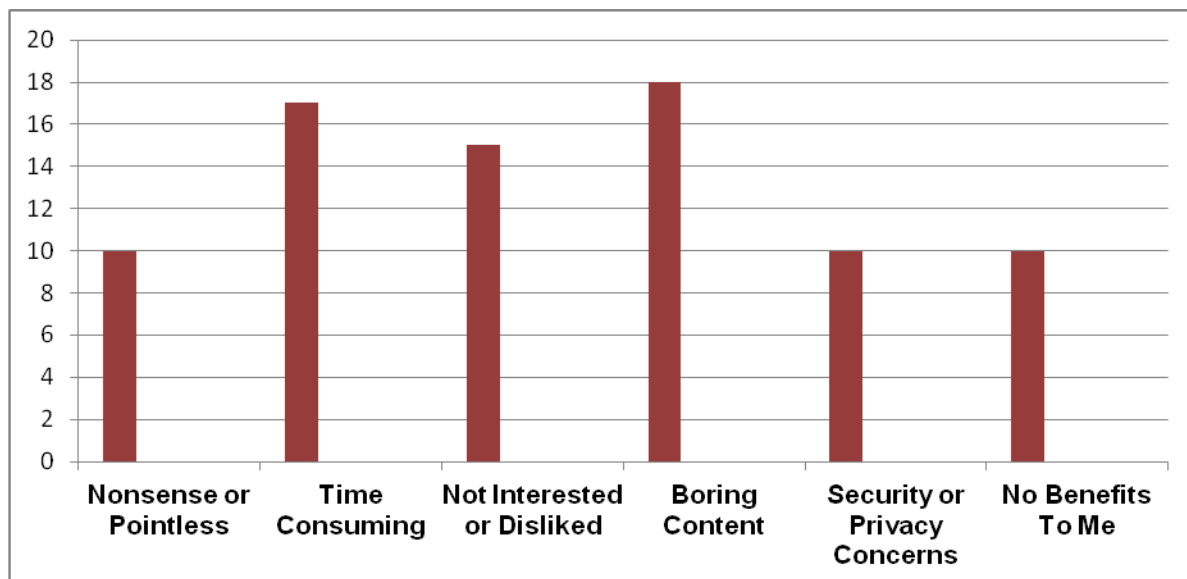


Figure 62. Reason given for stopping using social media (Yellow, 2018)

The six reasons given are reasonable, although feeling social media is boring seems the same as not being interested in it. Social media is also seen as time consuming and often users look at the posts and feel they are wasting their time with trivial or offensive content. Yet this survey shows privacy and security was not of great concern. By contrast, a qualitative study by Baumer et al. (2013) found a large majority of their interviewed study participants cited privacy concerns for leaving with one describing Facebook as it was like ‘living my life in a global aquarium’.

Users do not necessarily give up Facebook permanently, as Baumer et al’s. (2013) study found. In 2019 the Pew Research Center (2019) reported that 42% of Americans surveyed took a break from using Facebook, either not logging on or deactivating their account. Facebook itself claimed the number of next accounts rose near the end of 2018 to over 2 billion users and as at June 2019 2.38 billion (Timmering, 2019). Yet any decline is a concern for Facebook. Adams (2019) interviewed Larry Rosin, president of Edison Research a United States market research company, who explained why declining Facebook user numbers are concerning:

Kimberly Adams: In your survey you found an estimated drop of 15 million fewer Facebook users in the U.S. today than in 2017. That’s just in the U.S. Is this a meaningful drop for Facebook?

Larry Rosin: I don’t see how you couldn’t say it’s a meaningful drop. Fifteen million is a lot of people, no matter which way you cut it. It represents about 6 percent of the total U.S. population ages 12 and older. What makes it particularly important is if it is part of a trend. This is the second straight year we’ve seen this number go down. Obviously, the U.S. is the biggest market, in terms of dollars, and it’s going to be a super important market for Facebook or anybody who’s playing in this game.

Rosin states it is a trend of leaving Facebook that is occurring. Whitehead (2020) explains further reasons for leaving Facebook as:

Many of those who delete Facebook speak of widely recognised reasons for leaving the platform: concerns with its echo chamber<sup>40</sup> effects, avoiding time wasting and procrastination, and the negative psychological effects of perpetual social comparison. But other explanations seem to relate more to what Facebook is becoming and how this evolving technology intersects with personal experiences.

As Whitehead argues, negativity of many types on the platform is a strong indicator of users ceasing using Facebook. A comment by Baer (n.d.) suggests a common reason that emerged after the 2016 United States Presidential Elections for leaving Facebook was the discord and polarisation of political opinions and constant arguing over political issues:

In the shadow of the presidential election, there has been a continued polarization of thought in America, and an acceptance that the new normal is a climate of “us” vs. “them.” This is tiring. Each time you express an opinion on Facebook, you must defend that opinion from segments of your “friends” who are now “the opposition.” This squeezes the fun out of Facebook, like Fergie<sup>41</sup> squeezing propriety out of the national anthem.

Worldviews, what we think about an issue, are normally debated and argued rationally. Social media has made pointless and vicious arguing commonplace. In the history of Facebook, this chapter clarified that the platform was designed as a place of freedom of expression. But this has made Facebook a place where users will leave or reduce time on it because of the negativity people feel towards seeing such content. Differences of opinion have been a part of Facebook posts since its creation, but as it became a global platform were prescribed modes of behaviour, such as civility on it, have been discarded in favour of trolling, argument and abuse (Vervaeke, Mastropietro & Miscevic, 2017).

Much discussion and research has taken place showing that decline in usage is a concern to Facebook. What have increased are reports, including academic studies, on a link between depression, sadness and suicide associated with Facebook. Haidt (2018) argues those born after 1995, who are high users of Facebook, experience significant increases in anxiety and depression. He lists increased Internet use as a causal factor for this. In one study, Tromholt (2016) found in an experiment that a person’s life satisfaction significantly increased when they stayed off Facebook for only one week. Such findings have increased in many studies suggesting spending too much time on Facebook has a negative effect on the user’s state of mind.

Facebook’s main concern has been user trust issues especially after the Cambridge Analytica data scandal. Users had seen how Facebook was careless with protecting user’s privacy. The New York times reported in 2019 that millions of account passwords were stored insecurely that meant Facebook employees could access Facebook accounts (Chen, 2019). Brown (2020) investigated reasons for declining Facebook use finding trust in the platform, especially after the Cambridge Analytica scandal, declined and caused people to close their accounts. She recommended from her results greater accountability, which has been a constant call that users have made to make sure their data, privacy and freedom of expression remains on Facebook (Brown, 2020, p. 7):

Facebook and other social media companies need to be more transparent about the business model that they are using. The findings suggest that many users do



not really know how Facebook makes money and what aspects of their Facebook use is monetized. They do not always know what information is being shared and which parties their data are being shared with. Information on these matters needs to be more clearly articulated in a way that can be communicated to even the most inexperienced or youngest user. Specific information on privacy breaches must be shared. Users need to be advised on what breaches have taken place, how breaches occurred, and how their individual accounts have been affected.

Karppi (2011) argues Facebook users actually fear and loathe their data being used, distributed and exploited by others. The conclusion is that the declining use of Facebook has been influenced by many factors. In the next sections, key events from the 2018 to 2020 history period of Facebook are discussed that show further concerns users and the public had about the platform.

### **2018 - The Facial Recognition Feature**

In January 2018, Facebook announced more acquisitions, the search engine Dreambit and biometric ID system Confirm.io, of which facial recognition was a part of. The platform had the money to buy these companies but it was not always clear to users what these acquisitions would do. The desire for privacy and debates about it had always been a problem for Internet users, but Facebook was becoming less trusted because of user data breaches. People were willing to give their personal data to Facebook and agree to the Terms of Service. A metaphor for this is called 'dataism' where humans sacrifice their free will (data) at the altar of an algorithm (Koenigh, 2018; Harari, 2015) that uses the person's data they give Facebook. Concurrently, users disliked their data being used without their permission and the Cambridge Analytica data scandal had eroded trust in the platform.

It was not that Facebook was not creating safety procedures for users to protect themselves while using it. In December 2017 after purchasing a startup company called Confirm.io the platform introduced facial recognition as an optional choice for users. It alerts the user that a friend or friend's friend uploaded a photo of the user, even if the person has not tagged the user. However, Facebook stated the technology would keep users 'safe' by using this facial technology to identify who the user actually is by face photos (McMullan, 2018). Examples of facial recognition use including: identification of terrorists at airports (Introna & Wood, 2004), finding missing people (Kufilinski, 2019) and, in China, arresting jay walkers (Martin, 2019). However, as Martin (2019) states, the potential misuse of facial recognition is concerning and Facebook being aware of this offered users the option of opting out of facial technology.

### **Facebook, the Russian Connection and the 2016 Election of Donald Trump**

Facebook and other social media were used to influence United States election outcomes during 2016. This was seen as a form of spreading propaganda and favouring the Republican Party and Donald Trump who won the election over Hilary Clinton of the Democrat Party. Creating fake Facebook accounts, pages and groups were found to have been done by the Russian company the Internet Research Agency, named as a troll farm but having ties with the Russian government (BBC News, 2018).

Facebook eventually admitted in 2018 this creation of accounts was occurring, but Zuckerberg was alleged to have initially dismissed the idea it was happening, although later

apologising (Shinal, 2018). A hearing took place before the Select Committee on Intelligence of the United States Senate in November 2017 called Social Media Influence in the 2016 U.S. Election. It also involved other technology companies such as Twitter and Google. Richard Burr, a United States Senator from North Carolina who chaired the hearing, summed up in his opening address why this problem was significant for United States democracy (U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 2018):

I'll say it again: agents of a hostile foreign power reached into the United States, using our own social media platforms, and conducted an information operation intended to divide our society along issues like race, immigration and Second Amendment rights. What's even more galling is that, to tear us apart, they're using social media platforms Americans invented, in connection with the First Amendment freedoms that define an open and democratic society.

While it's shocking to think that foreign actors use the social networking and communications mediums that are so central to our lives today in an effort to interfere with the core of our democracy, what is even more troubling is the likelihood that these platforms are still being used today to spread lies, provoke conflict and drive Americans apart.

Your three companies have developed platforms that have tremendous reach and, therefore, tremendous influence. That reach and influence is enabled by the enormous amount of data you collect on your users and their activities. The American people now need to understand how Russia used that information and what you're doing to protect them. Your actions need to catch up to your responsibilities.

The media reported how widespread the fake accounts had become after Facebook removed them (Solon, 2018):

The people behind the accounts removed on Tuesday, which had a total of 290,000 followers, used virtual private networks (VPNs) to conceal their locations and internet phone services to hide their identities. They paid third parties to spend approximately \$11,000 (in US and Canadian dollars) for about 150 ads on Facebook and Instagram.

Solon and Siddiqui (2017) reported Facebook's responses to this as:

In April, Facebook publicly acknowledged for the first time that its platform had been exploited by governments seeking to manipulate public opinion in other countries, including during the presidential elections in the US and France.

The company described such tactics as "information operations" in a white paper authored by the company's security team, detailing well-funded and subtle techniques used by countries to spread misleading information and falsehoods in aid of geopolitical goals.

These fake accounts used popular musicians, such as Kendrick Lamar and Nicki Minaj as clickbait to lure people into reading advertisements and other propaganda material (O'Sullivan, 2018).

The reason why this was an important part of Facebook's history was its exposure to the public about the influence and reach of information posted on social media. Generally, people often do not critically examine and question content. Futurist Sardar (2015, 2010) states what has developed in society is a laziness to question and interpret presented information and find facts instead of just responding to constant relentless data. This is accurate of this period of Facebook's history. Voters read the fake account information which confirmed many of their own views were supported more so by the Republican Party and not by the Democratic Party. This is why Richard Burr's opening address at the senate hearing was important. Democracy is under threat when there is deliberate content created that is only one-sided and used to interfere in another nation's democratic processes.

Facebook did respond to this issue because of the potential of the advertisements and other fake content to appeal to extremist views. The trolls advertised 129 events across 12 pages that aimed to inflame opposing groups on topics such as Black Lives Matter or immigration (Lawler, 2018). That was a principle aim of the troll accounts; to inflame controversial debates that have been in American society for decades. Voters felt the Democratic Party no longer represented America's working class. Any content that appealed to potential change in political representation in the United States was generally seen as truthful content. This was harmful to the trust users had in Facebook. In 2019 Facebook unveiled new plans to fight any interference from fake accounts to influence the 2020 election campaigns by labelling news coming from state-owned media and increase transparency for the origin of the information (Abbruzzese, 2019).

### **2018 - Facebook Under Greater Scrutiny and Criticism**

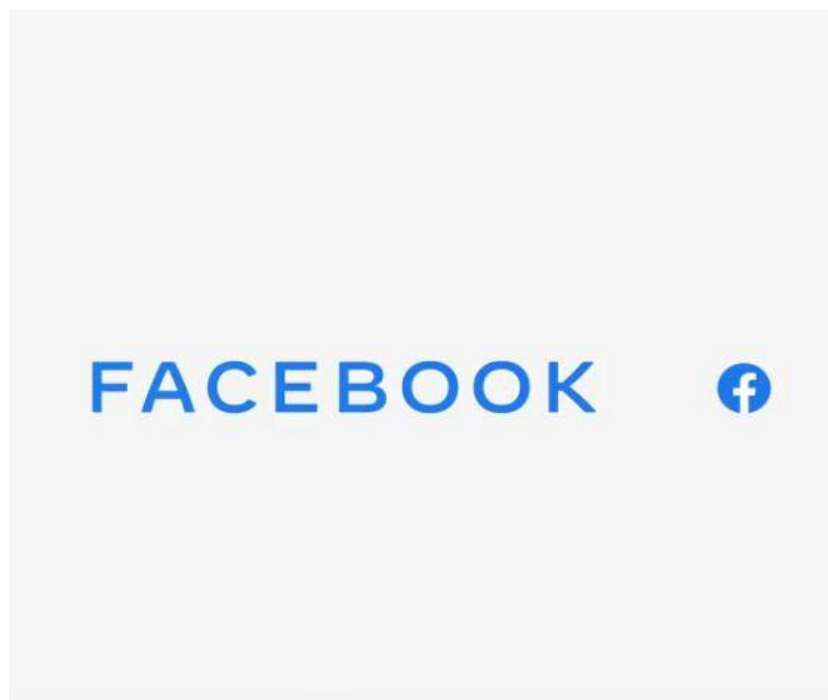
During 2018 Facebook encountered greater scrutiny and criticism as user trust was eroded and there were questions and debates over the negative aspects of the platform. In January 2018 Facebook confirmed active users in the United States and Canada had fallen, offset slightly by increases in use and new users in other countries. However, further scandals would erode public trust in the platform further. The Cambridge Analytica use of Facebook profile personal information damaged its reputation that has left lasting questions about data privacy and use. Harvesting 50 million user data without user permission was seen as a betrayal of trust. An online movement using the hashtag #DeleteFacebook trended on other social media like Twitter with posts urging users to leave Facebook. Lindsey Barrett of Georgetown's Communications and Technology Clinic commented that Facebook's profits and growth was put before the needs of users to privacy (Wong, 2019).

Additionally, the scandal was reported as helping Donald Trump to be elected in the 2016 election and Facebook lost \$50 Million United States dollars off the company's value (Molla, 2018). Zuckerberg in April 2018 attended hearings on Capitol Hill in Washington at congressional hearings to testify about what occurred. That same month in the United Kingdom, Facebook's Mike Schroepfer was questioned in that country's parliament as Zuckerberg's representative over several of the platform's issues. The data scandal will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Five.

## 2019 and 2020 Events - Facebook Attempts to Repair User Trust

The years 2019 and 2020 were marked by Zuckerberg and his public relations staff attempting to improve Facebook's financial and reputational status in society. The growth in competing social media platforms, growing mobile/cell phone apps, concerns about privacy, being seen not to care about users and anger over inconsistent censorship issues all contributed to Facebook's mixed public opinions about it. Zuckerberg and his company decided to attempt to remedy these issues so Facebook remained a first-choice social media platform to use.

A development in 2019 was the decision to change the Facebook logo to a more generic design with a slightly slimmer font and a small lightening of the blue colour. Figure 63 shows this logo design:



*Figure 63. Facebook logo 2019 (Zuckerberg, 2019a)*

As Facebook has several platforms which have had controversies of their own over time, the logo now represented the company, not a single platform. The rebranding is about trying to colour Facebook with some of the goodwill associated with its other brands, like Instagram and WhatsApp (Kastrenakes, 2019).

The storing of Facebook passwords in plain text in March 2019 was a setback in Facebook's plans to be seen as a trusted platform. Access logs showed some 2,000 engineers or developers made approximately nine million internal queries for data elements that contained plaintext user passwords (Krishnappa, 2019b). Facebook refused to reset passwords, but warned users to consider changing their passwords for their own safety.

Zuckerberg decided in 2019 to release a statement to make Facebook a privacy centred platform. He stated more attention would be paid to user privacy and consistently alert the user that they had control over what people saw them post on Facebook. In his speech

Zuckerberg (2019b) summarised the privacy problem and where he wanted Facebook to be in the future:

I understand that many people don't think Facebook can or would even want to build this kind of privacy-focused platform - because frankly we don't currently have a strong reputation for building privacy protective services, and we've historically focused on tools for more open sharing. But we've repeatedly shown that we can evolve to build the services that people really want, including in private messaging and stories.

I believe the future of communication will increasingly shift to private, encrypted services where people can be confident what they say to each other stays secure and their messages and content won't stick around forever. This is the future I hope we will help bring about.

His suggestions to solve this were:

- Private interactions. People should have simple, intimate places where they have clear control over who can communicate with them and confidence that no one else can access what they share.
- Encryption. People's private communications should be secure. End-to-end encryption prevents anyone - including us - from seeing what people share on our services.
- Reducing Permanence. People should be comfortable being themselves, and should not have to worry about what they share coming back to hurt them later. So we won't keep messages or stories around for longer than necessary to deliver the service or longer than people want them.
- Safety. People should expect that we will do everything we can to keep them safe on our services within the limits of what's possible in an encrypted service.
- Interoperability. People should be able to use any of our apps to reach their friends, and they should be able to communicate across networks easily and securely.
- Secure data storage. People should expect that we won't store sensitive data in countries with weak records on human rights like privacy and freedom of expression in order to protect data from being improperly accessed.

Studies of Facebook user privacy issues show repeated research results. This suggests users' concerns over time have stayed the same. For example, Stutzman, Gross and Acquisti (2013) reported on user concerns over 'silent listeners' or lurkers who are other users who share the Facebook platform with active users but do not interact with anyone. When active users were given more security options to manage such issues as lurkers or scammers they responded positively to such measures. When these were in place users felt a greater willingness to share information with those they did not know in groups or on pages. What is implied from this study is that users are concerned for their Facebook privacy, but will share with more people other than their friends and not be as concerned about lurkers, providing effective privacy settings are in place, especially being able to block someone who is asking for the user's

personal information. Also reporting lurkers and scammers has become easier as Facebook began to provide reporting mechanisms to do so.

What has to take place to increase confidence in the platform is a greater awareness for users to know how to protect one's Facebook account. This requires not only a technical awareness of what to do on Facebook to set desired privacy settings, requiring computer literacy skills, but also personally knowing what level of exposure they are willing to have on Facebook (Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn & Hughes, 2009).

A surprise announcement in 2019 was Cameron and Tyler Winklevoss proposing to partner with Facebook. The platform wanted to have its own cryptocurrency<sup>42</sup> so engaged in discussions with the twins about this issue. As at time of writing it was not clear about this outcome. However, people, and the media, were intrigued not only by the possible new business relationship of former foes, but also how the currency would work for users. Some countries and governments pushed back against Facebook refusing to allow Libra, the name of the project, to operate in their countries. The digital wallet Calibra which stores the cryptocurrency is still targeted to be available to users in October 2020 (Statt, 2020).

Push backs from governments forcing Facebook to comply to local laws have occurred in response to public concerns over the platform's behaviour. In April 2020, the treasurer of Australia instructed the consumer protection body the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) to develop a code of behaviour between media companies. Facebook and Google had to share advertising revenue with Australian media companies that they were previously not doing. It would be a mandatory code to be implemented into law by November 2020. The code requires digital platforms to negotiate in good faith on how to pay news media for use of their content, advise news media in advance of algorithm changes that would affect content rankings, favour original source news content in search page results, and share data with media companies (Taylor, 2020). Facebook stated its disappointment in the decision but the Australian government stated this would become part of competition law to prevent high levels of news content revenue leaving Australia (Karp, 2020).

## **2020 - Facebook and the COVID-19 Pandemic**

The final significant historical event for Facebook was the role it played in providing information and support during the 2020 worldwide COVID-19 Pandemic. This disease comes from the Coronavirus family where COVID-19 becomes a respiratory disease which is spread by droplets that people come into close contact with. It is thought to have originated in Wuhan in China in approximately December 2019. Social media has played a large part in many world disasters and many studies suggest it is a useful platform in finding information and providing differing types of support for users.

Yet like other social media, Facebook was subjected to false information, fake news, encouraging panic and the spreading of conspiracy theories. Clamp (2020) lists some of the issues associated with information on social media about the virus:

- It was a human-made virus made in a lab in China
- It is caused by 5<sup>th</sup> Generation Technology Network Towers

- Under or over estimation of how many people worldwide have it or have recovered from it
- Cures such as bleach or natural remedies
- Xenophobia blaming the Chinese for the creation and spread of the virus

Facebook created a Coronavirus (COVID-19) Information Centre which it added to its platform that is optional to follow. It shows updates and notifications worldwide about the virus and many issues around it. Figure 64 shows the information page:

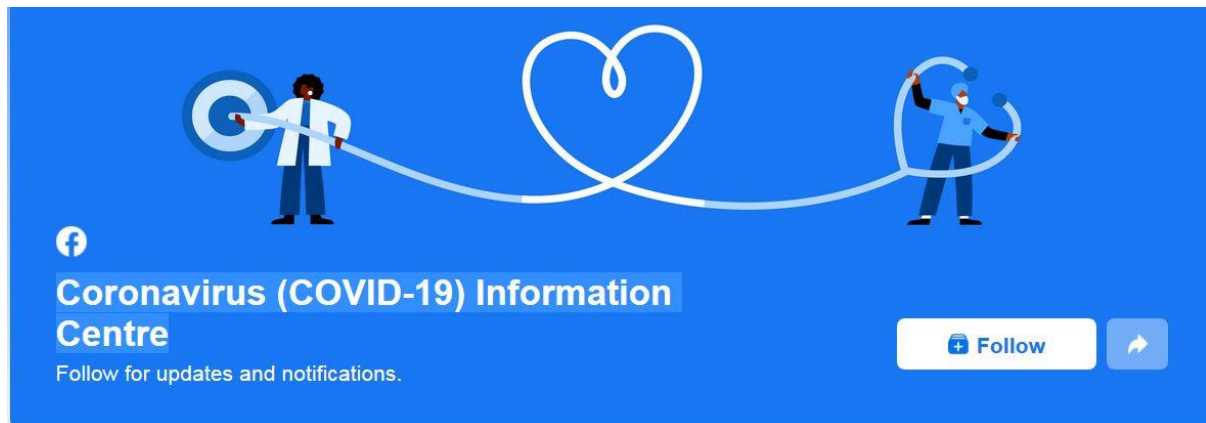


Figure 64. Corona Virus Facebook Centre page

The page includes the area where the user lives and links to health information. Figures 65 to 67 are taken from the page showing the variety of information available on it:

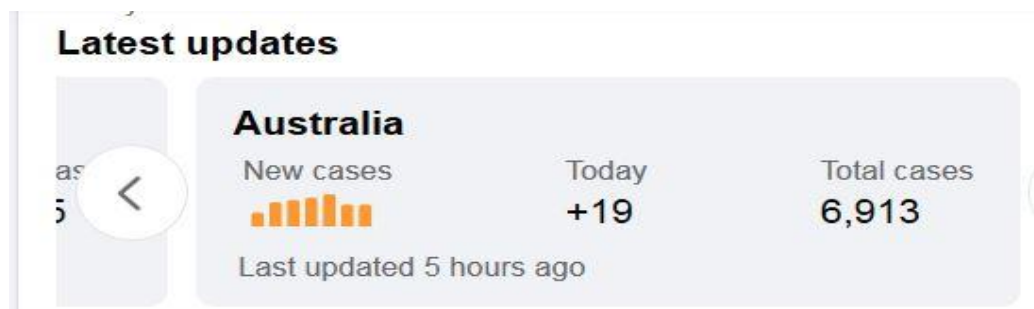


Figure 65. Updates on cases in Australia



Figure 66. Self-Care while in isolation example



Figure 67. Facebook users offering help to others<sup>43</sup>

Therefore, the page aims to inform and educate Facebook users and is public, which means that even those who do not have Facebook accounts can view the information without needing to join Facebook.

The problem was the large amount of fake news and false information content about the virus posted on Facebook. Especially concerning for Facebook are posts claiming cures for the virus, as Figure 68 shows. The platform approved a series of paid ads claiming news such as COVID-19 is a hoax and drinking bleach will keep one healthy (ABC News Breakfast, 2020). Facebook began alerting users who liked, reacted or commented on potentially harmful content, in turn being directed to the World Health Organization's Myth Buster Page<sup>44</sup> (Bond, 2020).



SERIOUS EXCELLENT ADVICE by Japanese doctors treating COVID-19 cases. Everyone should ensure your mouth & throat is moist, never DRY. Take a few sips of water every 15 mins at least. WHY? Even if the virus gets into your mouth...drinking water or other liquids will WASH them down through your oesophagus and into the stomach. Once there in tummy...your stomach ACID will kill all the virus. If you don't drink enough water more regularly...the virus can enter your windpipes and into the LUNGS. That's very dangerous.

Pls send and share with family, friends and everyone about this ! Take care everyone n may the world recovers from corona virus soon. May all be well n happy 🙏

- Ctto

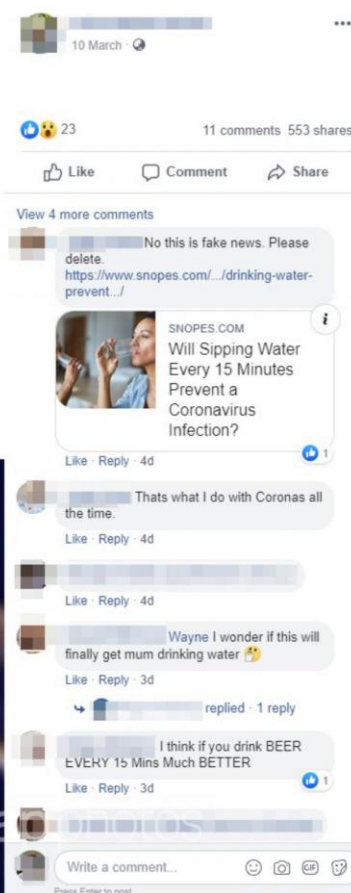
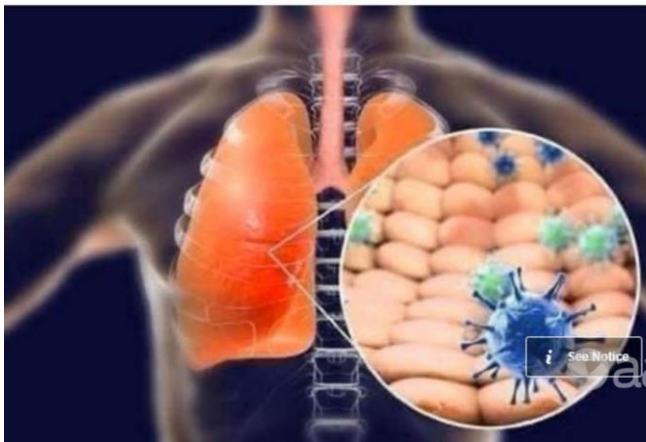


Figure 68. Fake Coronavirus post suggesting a cure for the virus (AAP, 2020)

Facebook decided not to take false information about the disease off its platform as Wong (2020) reported using factchecking services instead to debunk false information:

Facebook does not take down other misinformation about COVID-19, such as conspiracy theories about the virus's origins, but instead relies on its third-party factchecking system. If a factchecker rates a claim false, Facebook then adds a notice to the post, reduces its spread, alerts anyone who shared it, and discourages users from sharing it further.

Another area of content that has been moderated has been anti COVID lockdown protests especially those being held in the United States. These are where people protest in large groups demanding the governments where they live to reopen borders for the economy to survive. This is in contradiction to the advice given by health authorities to practice social distancing<sup>45</sup> or remain in lockdown in peoples' homes. Facebook removed the promotion of these protests in certain American cities. But they did not totally remove every protest and its organisation and promotion on Facebook, only doing so if the United States government prohibited it (Culliford, 2020).

Facebook faced between 2016 and 2020 a damaging time in its history. Numbers of users declined, it lost money, lost the trust of users with privacy issues and data breaches, and experienced legal and other challenges from the United States and other countries. The platform has regained some credibility and minimised declining use during the COVID-19

Pandemic as people turned to it for advice on the pandemic. Where its history goes to now is unknown but will likely still involve controversy.

## Facebook in Cinema: The Social Network and The Cleaners

It was inevitable that Facebook would appear in film and television in some form. Two that were released were the biographical movie *The Social Network* released in 2010 directed by David Fincher and the second the documentary *The Cleaners* released in 2018 directed by Hans Block and Moritz Riesewieck. In this section a brief discussion of both is done because they portray the history of Facebook and the problems of censorship which The Cleaners does. In this section a brief discussion of both is undertaken to show examples of how Facebook is portrayed in the cinema.

The Social Network was adapted from Ben Mezrich's novel *The Accidental Billionaires*. It covers the creation of Facebook up to the legal action taken against Zuckerberg by Cameron and Tyler Winklevoss as well as the settlement with former friend and Facebook Co-Creator Eduardo Saverin. It won three Academy Awards and its music score was created by Trent Reznor of music band Nine Inch Nails, and had singer Justin Timberlake play the role of Sean Parker. The official plot synopsis was posted on the Internet Movie Database<sup>46</sup>. Here the first and last three paragraphs describes the key events that shape the plot (Internet Movie Database, n.d.):

In October 2003, Harvard University student Mark Zuckerberg (Jesse Eisenberg) has the idea to create a website to rate the attractiveness of female Harvard undergraduates after his girlfriend Erica Albright (Rooney Mara) breaks up with him. Over the course of a single night, Mark hacks into the databases of various residence halls, downloads pictures and names of female students and, using an algorithm for ranking chess players supplied by his best friend Eduardo Saverin (Andrew Garfield), he creates in a few hours a website called "FaceMash.com", where male students can interactively choose which of two girls presented at a time is more attractive.

Meanwhile in England, while competing in the Henley Royal Regatta, the Winklevoss twins become outraged that Facebook has expanded to a number of universities there and they finally decide to sue Mark. Eduardo has also discovered the deal he signed with Parker's investors allows them to dilute his share of the company from a third to less than one tenth of one percent, while maintaining the ownership percentage of all other parties. He confronts his erstwhile friend Mark at his new Facebook office in downtown L.A. and announces his intention to sue him.

Later that night, Parker, along with a number of Facebook interns, is arrested for possession of cocaine during a party thrown on the occasion of Facebook's 1 millionth member. It is strongly implied (but never fully explained) that Mark had anonymously tipped off the police to raid the frat house where the party was held and probably had someone plant drugs at the party to intentionally have Parker and his interns arrested to remove them from the Facebook company.

In the final scene, a junior lawyer for the defense informs Mark they will be settling with Eduardo, since the sordid details of Facebook's founding and Mark's

cynical personality will make a jury highly unsympathetic to him. The film ends with Mark sending a friend request to his former girlfriend Erica on Facebook, and refreshing the page every few seconds waiting for a response that never comes.



*Figure 69.* Jesse Eisenberg who portrayed Mark Zuckerberg in *The Social Network* (Internet Movie Database, n.d.)



*Figure 70.* Actors Armie Hammer and Josh Pence as the Winklevoss Twins in *The Social Network* (Montgomery, 2011)

The film was a critical and box office success in 2010 but Mark Zuckerberg was quoted as being 'hurt' by the film. One error he said long after the film was released was that he was already dating now-wife Priscilla Chan during the platform's creation and was therefore not trying to use it to woo back an ex-girlfriend (Donnelly, 2014).

Critics and media commentators spotted and reported errors for years after the film's release. This did not bring the film into any disrepute or affect its critical or economic success. Zuckerberg and many of the characters who were portrayed in the film have commented about anomalies and errors in their portrayal, but have overall accepted the film and did not stop its release.

It is important to critically assess any film especially biographical films. Drawing on various commentators, these example quotes show that people examined the faults of the film but some also felt the film was accurate in other ways:

Painting Eduardo as a victim and Zuckerberg as a villain, the film neglects to mention that Facebook began to be starved for cash while Eduardo Saverin was in New York. It got so bad, Zuckerberg's family took out loans for servers (Carlson, 2010).

Facebook co-founder Chris Hughes responded to the differences between the Facebook movie and the Facebook real story by saying, "It's crazy because all of a sudden Mark becomes this person who created Facebook to get girls or to gain power. That's not what was going on. It was a little more boring and quotidian than that." - IFC (Chasing the Frog, n.d.).

Now, nearly a decade later and 15 years into the life of Facebook, I think I've realized something: The Social Network was right. Not necessarily historically accurate - only the people who were in the room know those truths - but about its messages: privacy matters (whether you're taking photos from a sorority web site or giving access to user data), connection comes with consequences, the tech boom gave an enormous amount of power to people who'd never touched it before (Watercutter, 2019).

These are a sample of the spread of opinion of The Social Network. The movie has also been analysed by scholars in film and cultural studies fields. McDonald (2013) analysed the relationships Zuckerberg had with women and with wanting to be part of the Harvard Elite group. Here McDonald (2013, p. 7) shows how Erica Albright makes Zuckerberg angry by mocking him over wanting to join a Harvard club:

Thus, Mark's preoccupation with gaining entrance into this elite society illustrates his desires to slough off his subordinated state and aspire to a form of hegemonic masculinity. However, his awareness of his social inadequacy results in his insecure attempts to assert masculine superiority. Erica, a successful Boston University student, attempts to indulge Mark's "obsession" and discuss how to enter one of the clubs. She asks which of the clubs "is the easiest to get into." Mark, however, immediately takes offense, and pointedly states, "I think you asked me that because you think the final club that's easiest to get into is the one where I'll have the best chance." Even though Erica innocently responds with, "The one that's the easiest to get into would be the one where anybody has the

best chance,” Mark interprets her comment as questioning his capability to rise to the level of hegemonic masculinity - or, in other words, emphasizes his hopelessly subordinated status, Mark’s greatest source of insecurity.

This analysis is present in watching the movie as Zuckerberg struggles with relationships of various kinds. Although it could not be found if Zuckerberg has admitted to having Asperger’s syndrome, comments have been made from watching the film that he may be on the autism spectrum (Holland, 2010; Fox, n.d.).

By contrast to the autobiographical recreation of Facebook’s history in the *Social Network*, *The Cleaners* is a documentary that focuses on the Facebook’s moderation and censorship practices in their offices located across the world. Being a global platform with over a billion users, moderating content is very challenging. To monitor Facebook’s content, moderators (called cleaners in the documentary) look at reported and other content to determine if it should be removed from Facebook and reported to authorities.

The *Cleaners* documentary specifically looks at the working lives of Facebook moderators at the Manilla, Philippines based, company TaskUs. These moderators are outsourced workers who have the sole job of looking at social media content for its violation of Facebook’s Community Standards. The problems of the workers dominate the first part of the documentary. A claim is they are not adequately psychologically prepared for the content. Sexual acts, actual suicides, self-harm, violence, cruelty, terrorist propaganda, pornography and seeing users threaten and bully each other are among content that is seen by moderators during the work day.

Though not all, the moderators are usually women between 18 and 24 years of age. The filmmakers stated the moderators undertake initial training with guidelines and criteria, but ‘used their gut’ and instinct to make decisions (Sumagaysay, 2018). They suffered stress and anxiety from seeing the content. Bishop (2018) notes that the movie builds on the problems the moderators have that social media wants engagement with users to keep going but the cleaners must turn complex decisions about content into simple delete or keep decisions:

It’s because the platforms in question have been expressly designed to generate interest and engagement above all else, and it’s in a platform’s best interests to never show a user news or information that would truly challenge their world view or turn them off, leading to insular bubbles where people are only fed the information they already want to see. Compounding that is the fact that outrage is awfully good at generating engagement, so we’re faced with a situation where these platforms have become algorithmically tuned to inspire and provoke as much extreme behavior as possible. On top of that is the idea that the cleaners themselves are tasked with turning what should be complex, nuanced questions - Is artist Illma Gore’s painting of a nude Donald Trump protected political speech, or an act of bullying, as one cleaner claims? - into the simplistic buckets of “ignore” and “delete”. The result is a system that renders the broader population angry, incited, and utterly ill-informed.

Leaving decisions to a group of people about what content should appear seems to suggest Facebook users cannot decide for themselves what constitutes offensive and distressing content. Although it is debatable from watching *The Cleaners* if we really want to always see

distressing content, it is suggested in the documentary we allow Facebook to determine for us what we should be viewing and posting. This is seen as violating one's freedom of speech.

## Conclusions and Summary

From this history chapter it may be assumed much of Facebook is a negative place and the company is itself unethical in managing user data. Although many topics in Facebook's history were covered, there was far more that Facebook has done since its creation that many have a view on that is not discussed in this chapter.

What this chapter suggested by splitting the history into three timeline periods was:

- From 2004 to 2006 Facebook became a well-used platform even with the limited university audiences that could only be members of it. Zuckerberg displayed a willingness to create a unique community to share information. Already the beginnings of conflicts with co-creators, friends, the university community and outsiders were in place to occur as it grew quickly. This period documented the creation and fast rise of Facebook.
- From 2007 to 2015 profound and quick financial changes and a move to a business model began as users in 2008 reached 100 million. Technical changes, making things more efficient for users, was at a forefront of design to keep up with potential competitors. Zuckerberg kept an eye on these competitors and in 2012 and 2014 wisely purchased Instagram and WhatsApp. The hindrance was the various law suits that showed Facebook and Zuckerberg was not immune from problems that plague businesses in the competitive technological sector.
- The 2016 to 2020 era saw Facebook become a large transnational company that even with declines in use in some countries, users still joined and used it daily. But the company would become subject not only to criticism for technical and business decisions, but also become mistrusted after data privacy issues like the Cambridge Analytica data scandal. Zuckerberg was now accountable not just to the judicial system, but politicians in the United States Government and later other country's governments. Yet Facebook still provides community and information finding for those who can overlook or tolerate its many decisions that have eroded trust in the platform.

Facebook can be viewed negatively in terms of the platform itself, the behaviours of those who use it and the conduct of Zuckerberg and the company. In the next two chapters an extensive discussion of the positive and negative issues Facebook presents is undertaken. Chapter Three discusses three areas Facebook has excelled in: provide support for the many forms of education undertaken by humankind, be a platform for creating and maintaining many types of friendships and creating groups where people can not only provide emotional and informational support, but build a community that helps people achieve many life goals.

## Notes

- 1 Obtained from an article written by Tom Huddleston Jr on the CNBC Make It website <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/16/how-mark-zuckerberg-described-the-facebook-in-his-first-tv-interview.html>
- 2 Obtained from <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2019/02/and-then-there-was-thefacebookcom/582004/>
- 3 Obtained from <https://charlenegagnon.files.wordpress.com/2008/02/a-brief-history-of-the-facebook.pdf>
- 4 A Review of Facebook Research in the Social Sciences by Wilson, Gosling and Graham was published in 2012 in the journal *Perspectives on Psychological Science* that is a literature review undertaken of 412 articles aiming to categorise different types of Facebook studies. This was done to assist researchers in deciding what areas and issues in the platform needed to be studied. The article also warned about the ethical and user privacy issues when using data from Facebook which continues today for academic researchers, mass media organisations and commercial marketers who have openly violated users' privacy and published content without permission and with user names and other details becoming visible to the public.
- 5 The study of Classics is identified by the University of Oxford (2019) as:

Classics (Literae Humaniores) is a wide-ranging degree devoted to the study of the literature, history, philosophy, languages and archaeology of the ancient Greek and Roman worlds. It is one of the most interdisciplinary of all degrees, and offers the opportunity to study these two foundational ancient civilisations and their reception in modern times.
- 6 It should be noted for disclosure that this photo was obtained from a Google search engine result. As it comes from a search result it does not require referencing, as advised by the APA6 Referencing this book uses.
- 7 The five founders' Wikipedia pages are located at these web addresses, as at 2020:
  - a. Chris Hughes - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chris\\_Hughes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chris_Hughes)
  - b. Andrew McCollum - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew\\_McCollum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_McCollum)
  - c. Dustin Moskovitz - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dustin\\_Moskovitz](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dustin_Moskovitz)
  - d. Eduardo Saverin - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eduardo\\_Saverin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eduardo_Saverin)
  - e. Mark Zuckerberg - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark\\_Zuckerberg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_Zuckerberg)

- 8 Feliciano-Misla (2018) defines an intranet as:

... the intranet is a digital software used in business and organizations for internal purposes and communication. An intranet is a private network typically used by employees to securely communicate, create content, collaborate amongst each other and develop the company culture. The prefix “intra” implies that an intranet is designed for internal communications only.

- 9 A basic definition explaining what a user interface (UI) is, that it is the series of screens, pages, and visual elements - like buttons and icons - that enable a person to interact with a product or service (User Testing Blog, 2019).
- 10 A definition of a Peer-to-Peer network is given from Neagu (2019) from the Digital Citizen website (<https://www.digitalcitizen.life/what-is-p2p-peer-to-peer>) as:

Peer-to-peer, or P2P in its abbreviated form, refers to computer networks using a distributed architecture. In P2P networks, all the computers and devices that are part of them are referred to as peers, and they share and exchange workloads. Each peer in a peer-to-peer network is equal to the other peers. There are no privileged peers, and there is no primary administrator device in the center of the network.

- 11 For a more extensive overview of Wirehog see the Wikipedia entry at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wirehog>

- 12 See Wikipedia for explanation of the Napster controversies and history at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napster>

McCourt and Burkart (2003) wrote an excellent and easy to understand account of Napster’s law suits and the effect of change on the music industry.

Also recommended in terms of the copyright issues of Napster is a paper by Raymond Shih Ray Ku (2002) at <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://scholar.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=5128&context=uclrev> as Napster was instrumental in significantly changing the way music was distributed.

- 13 Again as with other biographies of people involved with Facebook, I recommend Wikipedia as the first source to find out about Napster’s founders with Parker at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sean\\_Parker](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sean_Parker) and Fanning at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shawn\\_Fanning](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shawn_Fanning)

- 14 PayPal is an online payment system established in 1998 in the United States, which provides an easy and quick way to send and request money online (PayPal, 2020), pay for goods and services and was owned by eBay until 2015.

- 15 At that moment Eduardo would have known the new president of Facebook was Sean Parker.



- 16 As at March 2020 Accel Partners is still in operation in the United States.
- 17 A venture capital firm is usually involved with startup companies providing a form of capital to advance the Internet platform being created. It is considered a high-risk activity, but in Facebook's case it paid off well. Often banks will not lend money for such undertakings. Zider (1998) explains how such venture companies usually operate:

Venture money is not long-term money. The idea is to invest in a company's balance sheet and infrastructure until it reaches a sufficient size and credibility so that it can be sold to a corporation or so that the institutional public-equity markets can step in and provide liquidity. In essence, the venture capitalist buys a stake in an entrepreneur's idea, nurtures it for a short period of time, and then exits with the help of an investment banker.
- 18 Proof that About Face software owned [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) can be found at this web address as at March 2020 -  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20050302024655/http://facebook.com/>
- 19 See Figure 9 in Chapter One.
- 20 See Wikipedia (n.d.) entry for Google Maps that demonstrates what it offers at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google\\_Maps](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google_Maps) especially the opening paragraph:

Google Maps is a web mapping service developed by Google. It offers satellite imagery, aerial photography, street maps, 360° interactive panoramic views of streets (Street View), real-time traffic conditions, and route planning for traveling by foot, car, bicycle and air (in beta), or public transportation.
- 21 See Wikipedia (n.d.) for Winklevoss Twins information  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winklevoss\\_twins](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winklevoss_twins)
- 22 See Wikipedia (n.d.) for an explanation of ConnectU, also known as HarvardConnection, as the page is substantive in information about the company's history and gives more detail on the court case with Facebook  
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ConnectU>
- 23 See Wikipedia (n.d.) for a more in-depth discussion of the Oculus Rift Virtual Reality Headset [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oculus\\_Rift](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oculus_Rift)
- 24 Ben Gilbert's explanation of the case was published online on the web site Business Insider. It contains quotes obtained from other media sources. What it does is gives a less technical explanation of the case, making it worth reading for reporting the comments made by ZeniMax and their representatives in the case. It is found at <https://www.businessinsider.com/facebook-zenimax-oculus-vr-lawsuit-explained-2017-2?r=AU&IR=T>

- 25 The history of Facebook privacy offered by Boyd and Hargittai can be found in their First Monday study at <https://firstmonday.org/article/view/3086/2589>
- 26 Craig Mack's post in this quote has been edited. Facey is a term he uses for Facebook.
- 27 An Initial public offering (IPO), also referred to simply as a "offering" or "flotation," is when a company issues common stock or shares to the public for the first time (Phys.org, 2020).
- 28 To read about Facebook offering shares and the events during and after the initial public offering read the Wikipedia entry at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Initial\\_public\\_offering\\_of\\_Facebook](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Initial_public_offering_of_Facebook)
- 29 Facebook has been the target of spam for decades. To clarify what is commonly meant by Facebook spam, Varnsen (2020) states the following:

The types of Facebook spam range from those which are just annoying to others that can take and sell your personal information, post on your behalf and install malware on your computer. With spam and Facebook both big businesses, it's getting harder and harder to identify spam sometimes but these are the most common types of Facebook spam out there.

On the more not-malicious-but-really-annoying side of Facebook spam, work at home scams, male enhancement ads and unwelcome wall posts from those looking to promote a business, band or funny page are one of the most common types of Facebook spam. They don't necessarily hurt you, unless of course you willingly give them money, which is how they make a living.

Similar to the nasty types of Twitter spam, at the opposite end of the spectrum, more dangerous Facebook spam types are those which can steal your personal information, which is then sold for top dollar, take over your account and post spam all over the social networking site without your knowledge or even hijack your computer with malware, compromising saved files which contain the really juicy personal details like credit card numbers and email passwords.
- 30 Snapchat is a mobile app created by Evan Spiegel where a photo or video is posted, or incorporated into, what is called a story that disappears after 24 hours (Tillman, 2020; Moreau, 2019).
- 31 To view an extract of the letter sent to Zuckerberg with Nuñez (2016b) posting the questions that were in the letter, see <https://www.gizmodo.com.au/2016/05/senate-gop-launches-inquiry-into-facebooks-news-curation/>
- 32 As at May 2020 the letter is located at this web address <https://about.fb.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/22796A1389F52BE16D225F9A03FB53F8.facebook-letter.pdf>

- 33 Thompson and Vogelstein's (2018) article documenting their version of events about Fearnow's involvement in the Trending Topics controversy can be found online, as at May 2020, from <https://www.wired.com/story/inside-facebook-mark-zuckerberg-2-years-of-hell/>
- 34 A manifesto is defined as a public statement stating your views or your intention to something, and is a public declaration explaining past actions and announcing the motive for forthcoming ones (Vocabulary.com, n.d.).
- 35 The Guardian published The Facebook Files and accompanying documents on one web page. However, as at 2020, some content in the documents have been removed. Also, since publication some policies have changes and content is either now allowed or has been banned. For example, women breastfeeding babies and children has been a contentious area. It has been a long-debated issue with articles dating back to 2008 showing how deleting breastfeeding photos drew anger over their removal off Facebook. Over time it has both banned them as nudity, then allowed them, but not to show the woman's nipple, then allowed them to be shown mostly uncensored especially in Facebook groups (Moss, 2015; Waverman, 2015; Wollman, 2014; Matyszczyk, 2014; Protalinski, 2012). A Free The Nipple hashtag protested the censorship of breastfeeding and artistic naked photos being banned off Facebook took place which softened Facebook's policy on these photos, but there was still banning of these photos over the years.  
  
The Facebook Files is available to view at <https://www.theguardian.com/news/series/facebook-files>
- 36 Sadistic violence, or sadism, is defined as a type of behaviour in which a person obtains pleasure from hurting other people and making them suffer physically or mentally (Collins Dictionary, n.d.).
- 37 See the Criticism of Facebook Wikipedia page for a list of censorship issues at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Criticism\\_of\\_Facebook](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Criticism_of_Facebook)
- 38 The Vietnam War Napalm Girl, photographed in 1972 by Nick Ut, can be easily found online, but an example of where it can be found is at the MPR News website (Collins, 2017) at <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2017/03/13/a-photojournalist-who-changed-the-world-retires>
- 39 The small survey response rate of those using social media less conducted by Yellow needs to be acknowledged. Only 157 responded to their use of various platforms and only 80 gave reasons for why they did this. However, these results do illustrate reasons why people stop using social media including Facebook.
- 40 An echo chamber is an environment where a person only encounters information or opinions that reflect and reinforce their own. Echo chambers can create misinformation and distort a person's perspective so they have difficulty considering opposing viewpoints and discussing complicated topics. They're fueled in part by confirmation bias, which is the tendency to favor info that reinforces existing beliefs (GCF Global, 2020).

- 41 Baer is referring to American singer Fergie, formally of the group The Black Eyed Peas, who was criticised in 2018 for singing the American National Anthem, The Star-Spangled Banner, poorly at a National Basketball Association All Star Game in the United States.
- 42 A cryptocurrency is a digital or virtual currency designed to work as a medium of exchange. It uses cryptography to secure and verify transactions as well as to control the creation of new units of a particular cryptocurrency. Essentially, cryptocurrencies are limited entries in a database that no one can change unless specific conditions are fulfilled (Coin Telegraph, n.d.).
- 43 Figures 65 to 67 are obtained from my own personal Facebook account, Figure 67 has had the person's image and surname removed for privacy.
- 44 The World Health Organization's Myth Buster Page (n.d.) is located at <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters>
- 45 Social distancing became a term during the COVID-19 Pandemic where a set of instructions were given, worldwide, to prevent and minimise the spread of the virus, such as staying at home, staying 1.5 metres away from another and not shaking hands.
- 46 The full synopsis of The Social Network can be found at <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1285016/plotsummary#synopsis>

# CHAPTER THREE

## POSITIVE USES OF FACEBOOK

### **Education:**

The strength of Facebook as a learning management system arises from its ability to facilitate a feeling of expressive engagement. With Facebook, a user's profile serves as an expression of his or her identity, and thus, the person feels a sense of "network citizenship." Such citizenship can be understood to be a fundamental part of the learning process because it extends the level of student responsibility and investment in that process. - Tael Harper (2014, p. 84), University of Western Australia<sup>1</sup>

### **Facebook Friendships:**

You can always talk to them and keep in touch. -

(Roger, personal communication, May 7, 2020)<sup>2</sup>

It's like an extended family network. They are there for you when you are going through bad times and good. Always ready to talk if you message them and vice versa. -

(Tracey, personal communication, May 7, 2020)<sup>3</sup>

### **Facebook Groups:**

You get to see old stuff from the past which you grew up with. -

(Roger, personal communication, May 7, 2020)<sup>4</sup>

Love being part of some pages such as cat groups you get to see all kinds of cats and if anyone has a problem or you have one there is always someone that can answer or help with suggestions. -

(Tracey, personal communication, May 7, 2020)<sup>5</sup>

This chapter examines three positive uses of Facebook. These are: using it for education purposes, making Facebook friends and joining Facebook groups. These illustrate that despite the negative issues Facebook has had it does provide a successful and wanted virtual support mechanism for connection, learning and community. People want to connect, form relationships and find information about something. Facebook offers these opportunities.

Drawing on Facebook and other literature, the benefits of these three uses are explored while acknowledging some possible disadvantages with them. Section one, educational use of Facebook, examines the role it has in supporting student learning. Students of all ages have used social media to support their studies for help and support as they learn. Section two discusses making and managing Facebook friends expanding on this topic that was introduced in Chapter One. In Section Three, Facebook groups are discussed showing how these create spaces where people share common and divergent views.

## Facebook and Education

Facebook has been used as a platform to support many types of students studying different types of subjects at many levels. An individual student can use the platform to find information and connect with others to assist them with their studies. Facebook pages' and groups' members range from primary aged students to those in postgraduate studies undertaking doctoral or professional education. They are used by students, teachers, researchers and professionals for collaboration, problem-solving and learning support. An advantage to the student of joining education groups and pages is that the open nature of a Facebook group provides a convenient platform for cooperative and/or collaborative learning that is available at any time (Miron & Ravid, 2015).

Not having a Facebook account can place the student at a disadvantage in their learning when they cannot access non-public content. Concurrently, students may feel forced to have a Facebook account or they cannot access needed course material. The choice is usually the student's one, but in some educational institutions and courses, Facebook is necessary to join.

Using Facebook to help with one's education brings many potential benefits that connected learning can bring. The term connected learning in this context is described by Ito et al. (2013, p. 8) as:

Connected learning centers on an equity agenda of deploying new media to reach and enable youth<sup>6</sup> all ages who otherwise lack access to opportunity. It is not simply a "technique" for improving individual educational outcomes, but rather seeks to build communities and collective capacities for learning and opportunity.

Studies find that Facebook has much potential for promoting connected learning, and in turn encourages equality and support that is needed for student study success (Nguyen, 2017). As Akcaoglu and Bowman (2016) argue, the connectedness that social media offers is in closing the perceptual gap between students and their course instructor, classmates, and the course material itself. Therefore, the assessment is that using the platform for educational support does assist in student learning, providing the student participates in some form in using it.

An important point about creating educational Facebook groups and pages is that in their integration into courses, they are created informally, mainly by students, and formally by schools, colleges, universities and educators (Kent & Leaver, 2014; Pimmer, Linxen & Gröhbiel, 2012; Kayri & Çakir, 2010; McCarthy, 2010; Schroeder & Greenbowe, 2009, Haverback, 2009). Often for individual subjects or courses, groups of students may decide in the absence of a page for the education group to create one and run it themselves.

A common reason for positive perceptions of creating and joining a Facebook education group is stated as (Akcaoglu & Bowman, 2016, p. 5<sup>7</sup>; Bowman & Akcaoglu, 2014):

"I think it is a great way for everyone in the class to communicate and post our discussion posts for the class. It is easy to do this because almost everyone already had a Facebook and those who didn't have one yet made one. Facebook is something that a lot of people check daily so by having to post our work on it anyways it is a good source of social media that is used for the class."

Although some students are hesitant for privacy reasons to join education groups, with Facebook's available privacy options they can separate their personal postings from the private. Students maintained a degree of separation between everyday uses of Facebook and its use for formal learning, likely because of the technical differentiation of the group from a normal user News Feed page (Allen, 2012, p. 221; Estus, 2010). Therefore, it is accurate to state that joining an education Facebook group or page is an overall positive use of the platform. Though issues may arise and the group once a course is over is usually abandoned by the students, finding information and support during undertaking a course or subject is facilitated well by Facebook.

### Examples of Facebook Education Use

Having established the usefulness of Facebook for education, this section shows examples of how this takes place. The emphasis in these examples is on information seeking, problem solving and different aspects of human support. Each example is either from a student Facebook group or a formal education authority such as a school, university or education body:

#### Example 1:

This is a mathematics student support Facebook group where students ask for help with mathematical issues. In Figure 71 a member of the group has asked for assistance to a maths problem, receiving a reply on how to solve it:

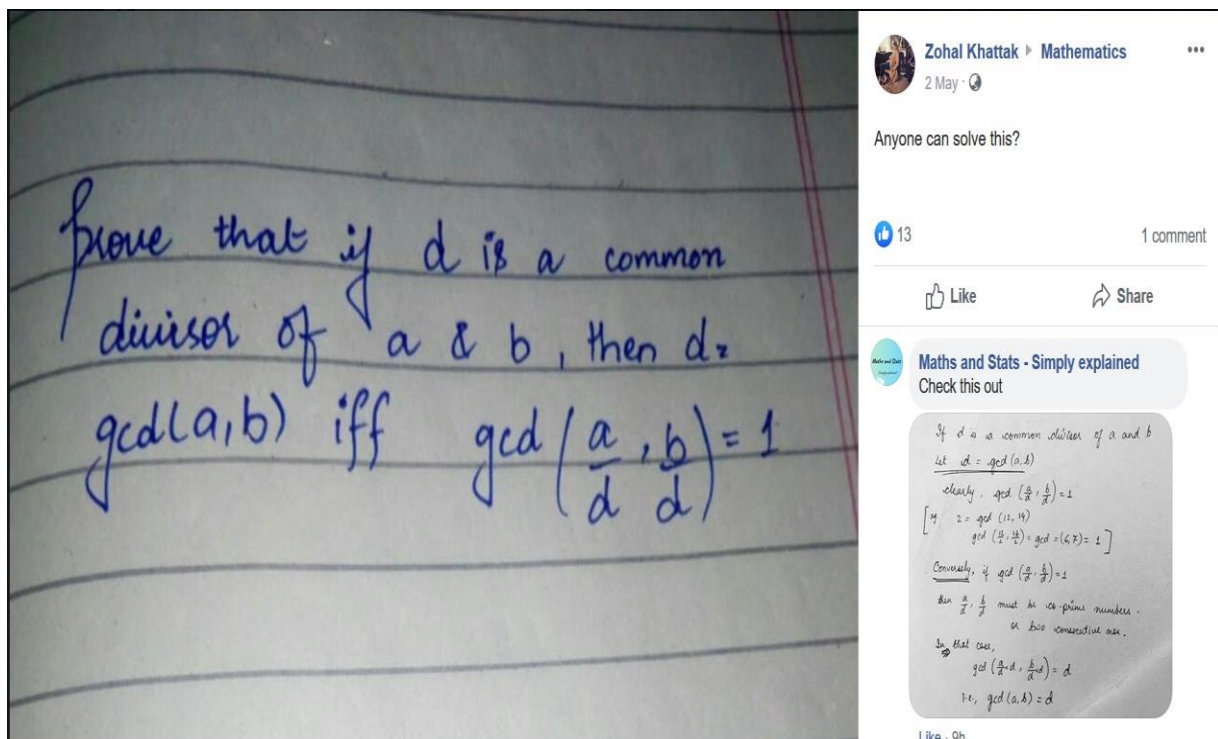


Figure 71. Giving learning support to a student in a Facebook Education Group (Khattak, 2020)

**Example 2:**

In this group for a primary school, likely aimed at parents or carers of primary school age students, a member shares a resource, her new Facebook page of resources, offering other members a free trial:



Figure 72. Primary school educational resource (Jayne, 2020)

**Example 3:**

This organisation has a Facebook education page supporting Queensland secondary students. In Figure 73 the resource is access to high school mathematics fact sheets to support students undertaking the three mathematics' levels. It provides information to the student as well as offering resources to contact people for help. Why this is useful in an educational context is that during the time this was posted, school students were undertaking home schooling due to the COVID-19 virus. The final year of high school is especially stressful for students, managing home schooling during this time was also challenging for them. These fact sheets assisted with directing students on how to undertake upcoming mathematics exams:



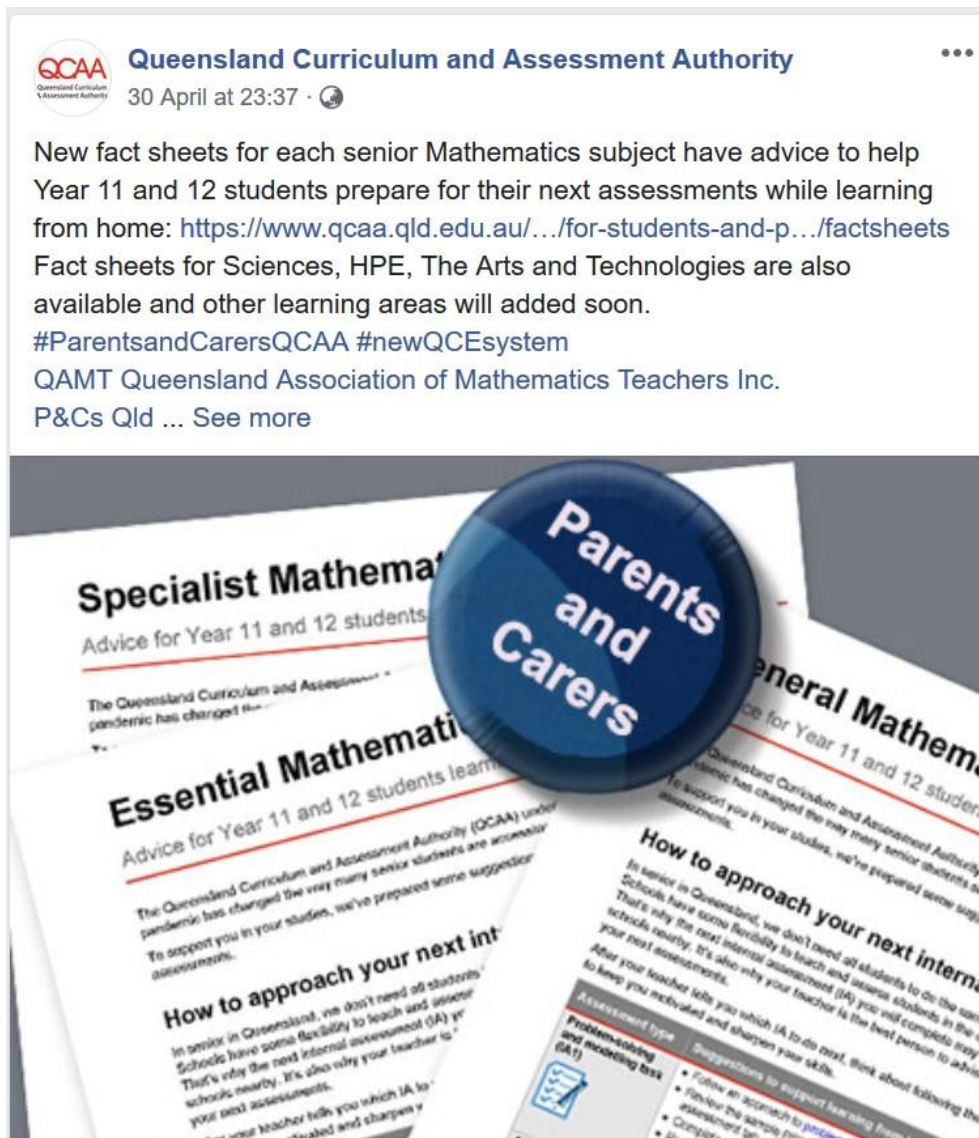


Figure 73. Facts and advice sheets for Queensland mathematic students (Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2020)

#### Example 4:

Undertaking a research degree, Master of and Doctor of Philosophy, is especially challenging. Students will often make educational Facebook pages for resource sharing and groups for sharing and supporting students. The usefulness of these often occurs when the student is having difficulty in areas such as: writing the introduction to the thesis, literature reviewing, understanding and applying research methods, writing the results section and the conclusions section. To join a Facebook group while undertaking a long research project can offer many benefits to students. Obtaining peer support from other students is often a desirable part of joining one. Figure 74 is a post from a large Facebook group that gives advice and support to those writing a PhD. In this example, advice is given on a well-known difficult topic for researchers of making one's research rigorous:

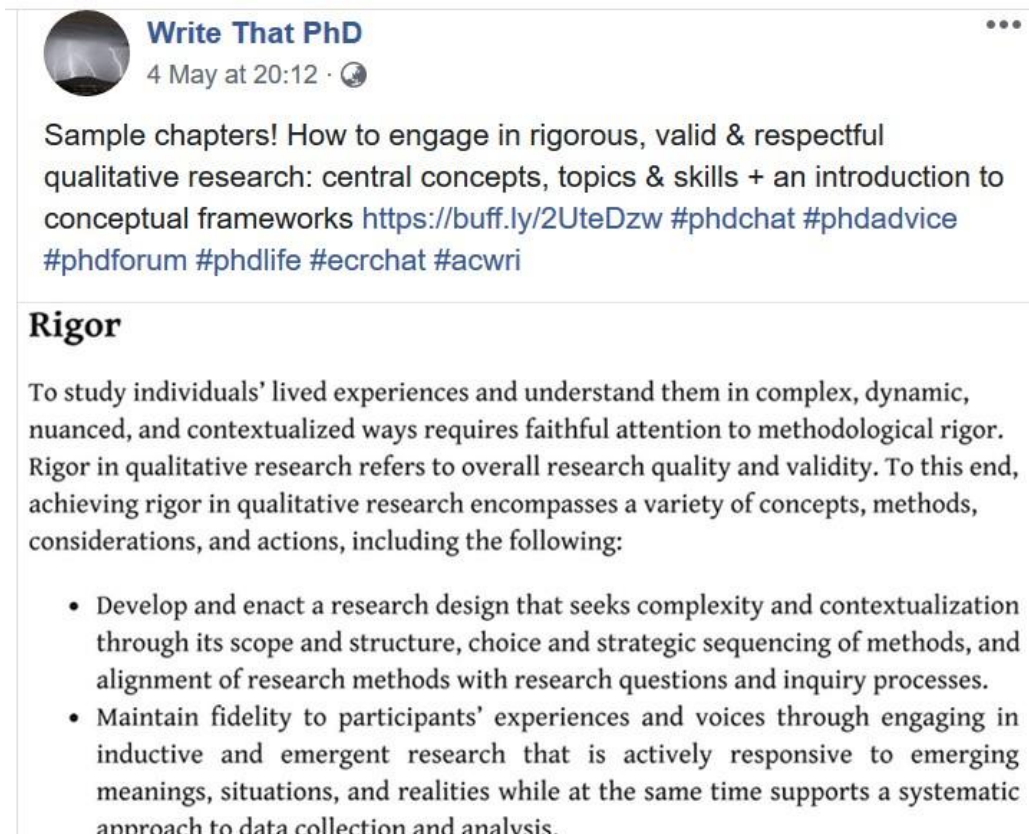


Figure 74. Education Facebook group advice giving (Write that PhD, 2020)

### Evidence for Facebook Educational Groups being Positive for any Student

Measuring and assessing the positive effectiveness of Facebook groups and pages on students has been long studied since Facebook was used for study purposes. A broad study finding is that groups have more successful and positive effects than negative ones. Study results do rely on sample size, research methods (qualitative, quantitative or mix methods) used and type of research question asked. Usually, this research tries to find out what is successful about using Facebook for learning and support. It is important to understand why this is the case because even with growing social media alternatives to Facebook, students will often default to creating a group on it to assist with their studies and obtain support from other students.

To explore this, a random sample of empirical studies is provided in Table 6 that shows the results of survey and interview data analysed to explore the reported positive successes of Facebook student groups. As a starting point, Sandry (2014, p. 3) states the function of Facebook for students is:

A Facebook group provides a visible network of people involved with a course or unit that have decided to join the group. It therefore acts as a collection point for students, with the potential for supporting a community of learners in a particular subject area.

Table 6 displays ten studies on how Facebook as a collection point is positive for students:

Table 6  
*Examples of Facebook education groups positive reasons for being part of one*

<b>Researchers and Publication Year</b>	<b>Positive Findings Reported</b>
Steinfeld, Ellison & Lampe (2008)	University students having self-esteem issues reported experiencing fewer social barriers when joining educational Facebook groups.
Lampe et al. (2011)	Using Facebook as a part of a classroom is positively linked with cognitive and affective learning outcomes, as well as more comfortable classroom atmosphere.
Hunter-Brown (2012)	...many students stated that the use of Facebook made class more engaging and that teachers who use it are “up with the times.”
Meishar-Tal, Kurtz & Pieterse (2012)	Students felt that Facebook encouraged them to express themselves. Even passive students had the ability to express their presence on the Facebook group by indicating “like” on chosen posts.
Dougherty & Andercheck (2014)	Students studying a complex sociology course found the Facebook group invaluable to share ideas and resources on a challenging essay assignment with collaboration between students encouraging independent and active learning.
Chou & Pi (2015)	Easy to communicate, discuss issues with and interact with peers in a Facebook group, and that this platform offered an effective environment to share content, chat and create learning activities.
Akcaoglu & Bowman (2016)	Found study interactions important to student success as quoted by a participant - “I think a Facebook group is an amazing opportunity to allow students equal chances at participating in a class, and keeping class discussions active throughout the week.”
Barden (2017)	Students used a Facebook group to discuss dyslexia issues, in turn feeling a large degree of control and self-determination over their dyslexia.
Nguyen (2017)	Facebook, students can exchange ideas and collaborate to accomplish common academic tasks minimising worry about physical distance or time differences.
Coleman, Pettitt & Buning (2018)	Offers multiple ways to connect to others and maximises potential to connect with people otherwise not interact with.

In a study I undertook, I examined Facebook use by a group of students who were undertaking Masters and PhD research degrees. Many studies of those doing these degrees identified that students may fail them because they do not feel heard by their colleagues or supervisors, which can be distressing to the student (Nycyk, 2019; Ali & Kohun, 2007). In 2015 I undertook a free course about writing for higher degrees. In the course, one woman who was an older learner got the idea to create a Facebook page to support older learners. As she reported (Australian National University, ANU Law School, 2017):

“They’d asked us why we were doing the course so I wrote that it was difficult as an older person doing a PhD coming from a career that I’d already established, to be suddenly immersed in a very different culture,” she said.

“I found it very lonely. For the people going through university the first time around, their needs for support were quite different than the needs of someone in my situation. I was in my 50’s by that stage.

“I got a huge response from all of the people in the MOOC - there were about 11,000 people around the world in the MOOC - and I ended up with about 350 people writing to me and exchanging ideas with them on the MOOC chat board became very time consuming.”

Because the group’s membership increased very quickly over two years, I agreed to investigate this by a qualitative member survey. It was unsurprising that the group would get a large majority of positive answers despite asking how the group could be improved. Three types of positive experiences were found discussed here with some student’s quotes (Nycyk, 2019):

### **1. Joining for Support and Connection**

I was doing a PhD at a mature age and wanted to see what others thought about learning with all the tasks that older students have

Having a sense of community, its great having somewhere to chat PhD stuff with people on the inside rather than the friends and family who have less of an idea even if they are wonderfully supporting

### **2. Benefits of Joining Group**

As an external student and in my late 50s it is a lifeline to know there are other older students out there

Social support. Knowing there is a group of people in the same situation who I can offer support to and can provide me with support if I need it

### **3. Help Sought and Solutions Found**

I was feeling terrible last November, it was my birthday and no progress in my thesis, so I posted my issues on the group and got more than 20 positive comments within a few hours. Some even offered to review my writing. It was so great!

Asked about my confirmation panel presentation, got a range of great suggestions, followed some of them and did very well

One exception of this group to many other educational support Facebook groups is the observation that it is a strong, ongoing community that still exists as at 2020. Many groups are abandoned after the students have finished the course or their degree. It was noticed that after graduation some returned to the group over time to give advice. When students realise the similarity of their values with their groups, they will have a higher tendency to join them, but may also stay on after their goals have been achieved (Cheung, Chiu & Lee, 2011). In some cases, students friended each other outside of the group, as Liang and Carey (2005) found in a study they did on online student collaboration, where two students recognised they had developed a good online friendship and decided to keep it after the course was over. This is a side benefit of joining an education group.

### **Conclusion of Education Groups as a Positive Use of Facebook**

In Hunter's (2012, p. 63) research she interviews one teacher who provides an overview of the positive nature of Facebook education groups:

Social Networking is ubiquitous in our society, to say nothing of the high school setting. Since becoming a member of the teaching community, it has seemed obvious to me that Facebook could provide an invaluable virtual tool to enhance the physical classroom. It wasn't until my third year of teaching, however, when a colleague showed me how she utilized Facebook groups in her classroom that I began to effectively implement the media as an instructional tool. I had been looking for a way to facilitate online discussions for both my regular and AP courses, but the students were frustrated and unimpressed by some of the strictly "educational" forums we tried out. The students suggested we use Facebook instead, and after talking it over with a colleague who had already set up something like this in her classroom, I decided to go for it. Once the groups got started, we used them for so much more than straightforward discussion. Facebook became an effective tool for sharing ideas, posting reminders, and publishing student work.

Providing this supportive learning environment can have positive effects on student study outcomes. As an ideal, pleasure and enjoyment can be derived from using Facebook and has had a correlation with better grades, learning motivation and fosters an intention to keep using the platform in the future (Moorthy et al., 2019).

It should be acknowledged though that there are negative aspects to using educational Facebook pages. Bullying has been known to occur, not every member of the group contributes regularly to the group and the teacher/lecturer/tutor may be hesitant for professional reasons not to associate with students in that environment. Also, many new platforms have been created especially on mobile/cell phones such as the Discord communication app that students may prefer to use. However, the assertion in this chapter is that the positive aspects of using Facebook for educational purposes are varied. Research in this area overall shows this to be the case. Although it means being forced to create a Facebook account, if the student chooses to join a group the benefits of information sharing,

personal and study support, as well as collaborating on assignment work, brings many positive benefits to the student.

## Facebook Friends

A major use of Facebook is to keep and maintain friendships, as well as make new ones. The individual can amass 5000 friends and use the Follow function to have even more. As a positive aspect of Facebook, the potential for supportive relationships and being connected to others is a major part of the platform. This is so even though people may be geographically distant and may not meet offline even if they live in the same city. In this section, while acknowledging friendship on Facebook has been widely debated as if it is friendship, it is argued that making friends through this platform is a major attraction to taking out a Facebook account.

### What is a Friend?

Defining friendship has been a preoccupation of scholars since the times of Greek philosopher Aristotle. Various characteristics define friendship, such as closeness and platonic intimacy. Five definitions of friendship are:

Friendship, as understood here, is a distinctively personal relationship that is grounded in a concern on the part of each friend for the welfare of the other, for the other's sake, and that involves some degree of intimacy (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2017).

An attachment to a person, proceeding from intimate acquaintance, and a reciprocation of kind offices, or from a favourable opinion of the amiable and respectable qualities of his (sic) mind (KJV Dictionary, 2020).

Friendship... is a kind of virtue, or implies virtue, and it is also most necessary for living. Nobody would choose to live without friends even if he (sic) had all the other good things....(Doyle & Smith, 2002).

Whatever else friendship is, it is, at least typically, a personal relationship freely, even spontaneously, entered into...(Cooper, 1977).

...somebody to talk to, to depend on and rely on for help, support, and caring, and to have fun and enjoy doing things with (Rawlins, 1992).

What it means to be a friend is individual to the person and is different across many cultures. For example, you may call someone you work with a friend but you do not see them outside of the work environment. In describing friendship, caring type words are used such as: welfare, intimacy, favourable, respect, support and love. It may be considered to some that Facebook friends do provide these even though they are not physically present.

Despite the desire for people to have friends, the variation between someone who has no to little friends to those that have many depends on many factors and one's status in life. Friendship has no obligations like a marriage does and is voluntary, and is a fragile bond that can be disposable (Tillman-Healy, 2003; Weiss, 1998; Werking, 1997; Rawlins, 1992). It can also be an overused term or used in a way that is not true, such as when someone uses the

term at you 'my friend'. The arrival of the Internet and the breaking down of geographic distance played a part in changing the definition of friendship.

### Facebook Friendships

Making friends on Facebook can be a rewarding and a positive experience. Yet this simple act is quite a complex undertaking for many reasons. This section asks are our Facebook friends really our friends in the way an offline friend is? Our offline friends may actually be our online friends though. Over time though, for many reasons, we may decide to accept friend requests from those we do not know or from people we knew from school, university or past places we have worked. Potential Facebook friends may decide to send you a request for many reasons.

There are also reasons that may be sinister as to why people request to be a friend, such as stalking or finding out information about another. Overall, the discretion to friend someone is taken with caution but some users do not mind having up to the allowed 5000 Facebook friends. Figure 75 is a meme that parodies this type of thinking about having so many Facebook friends, suggesting that it is impossible to have that many close personal friendships with so many even though Facebook supports this feature:



Figure 75. Meme parody most Facebook friends are acquaintances (Imgflip, n.d.)

Having so many friends means managing your Facebook user profile with care. Many users allow so many friends as they may be promoting themselves or a product for commercial purposes which Facebook does not allow, but often does occur.

It is also important to consider this issue of why we friend certain people and not others. There is much evidence suggesting we have become automatically accustomed to viewing Facebook friends as friends in the same sense as we do our offline friends. This has been disputed in many studies and in the media. Stone (2020) argues a Facebook friend and an offline friend you interact with are seen as the same type of relationship when they are actually different:

Online being a ‘friend’ assumes that you have simply been provided access to someone’s profile and may not interact with them again, yet still see their arguably ‘personal’ posts online. Offline being a friend involves answering calls, helping with any problems they may be having, generally just spending time with each other in mutual agreement of fondness. Online a users list of friends is not segregated by friends, acquaintances and strangers which means there is no way to define who is someone’s friend in real life. There is little to no context on SNS as to what each name listed under ‘friends’ really means to that user.

This does not mean that a Facebook friendship cannot be meaningful to have. The decision to view an online friend as a friend in the same context as an offline friend is the decision of the person.

To revise an important concept from Chapter One, the act of unfriending someone on Facebook can be hurtful (Page, 2011; Richardson & Hessey, 2009). Facebook is a convenience used for what is called relational maintenance purposes, also described as technological “mediated relational maintenance (Shariffadeen, 2018; Tong & Walther, 2011; Joinson, 2008; Wright, Craig, Cunningham, Igiel & Ploeger, 2008). Hoffman (2008, p. 123) in his study of friendship and electronic communication, obtained this comment from a participant describing how they manage their Facebook friendships:

I think it’s an extension of what I have in my real life because, like you have, in real life you have your friends and then you have like your acquaintances that you’ve met a couple of times, you don’t really hang out with them, but you know who they are, they know who you are. You might say hi every once in a while, and it’s the same with Facebook, like you have your friends that talk to you all the time and there’s the people that might stop by when you have a birthday and they’re like, “Hey, Happy Birthday. I want to see you again.” And it’s pretty much the same as real life, it’s just an extension.

This extract illustrates a common view on Facebook friendships. While they are questioned as being ‘real’ friendships, that does not imply that in some way they cannot be supportive, positive interactions. Some people, a noticeable trend over many years since the Internet became publically used, may actually prefer to have friendships only online. Shyness, anxiety, autism spectrum conditions, geographically isolated or living with a physical disability are some examples of people who may make friends by Facebook or other SNS platforms only.

Friendship research, especially related to Facebook friends, has explained why friending is not always a simple matter. For example, it has been argued is that people on social media can really only maintain about 150 meaningful relationships at any time (Fischetti & Christiansen, 2018). The relationships between the user and the friends may be different and require different interaction rules depending on the nature of the person the user is friends



with. Interaction rules prescribe implicit behavioural norms that allow individuals to engage in cooperative social interaction. They dictate standards of behaviour, reward exchange, and cooperation within groups (Bryant & Marmo, 2012; Argyle, Henderson & Furnham, 1985; Argyle & Henderson, 1984; Argyle & Furnham, 1983). Having many types of friends presents content posting management issues that need to be considered. This is why Facebook provides users with the ability to control types of posts when the user only wants certain friends to see the content. These interaction rules should be carefully considered and it should be thought about what you want certain friends to not see what you post.

As an example of the complexity of managing friends, the user may friend different types of people from their past and present. If they are friends with those they went to school with, the group may make jokes or unflattering comments about teachers or other students. These are intimate interactions. They may also be friends with their boss on Facebook and need to be mindful of more casual or inappropriate comments as professional or formal interaction rules will likely apply to that type of friendship. For example, an Australian nurse posted negative content about her employer on Facebook. The post was seen and she was dismissed as it breached the company's social media use police, although in this case she won an unfair dismissal claim against the company (Elmas, 2019).

Taking offensive or hurt with Facebook friends while subjective and individual, can damage a positive Facebook friend relationship. To illustrate, three examples<sup>8</sup> taken from Facebook are given that may potentially offend friends who see that post. Yet other friends may not see a problem with what was posted:

**Example 1: Friend jokes about to another friend about who is being interviewed on a television show**



The interpretation here is the inference that musician Daniel Johns is gay as the use of the word 'queens' towards politician Hillary Clinton and Johns is a term used in the LGBTIQ community. Although the individuals named would unlikely be offended, and Johns and the Facebook user are not Facebook friends, some other friends reading this may take offense at the comment implying John's sexuality as gay. They may object to that implication being stated or have an issue with homosexuality.

**Example 2: Friend teases another about being on dating phone app**

In this example two friends, one male one female, tease each other over a new Facebook profile photo the male had posted. She opens the post with saying it is a photo to be used on the phone app Grinder, which is used for men to meet other men for, mostly, sexual purposes. He plays along with humorous banter and appears not to be offended to be called a 'slut'. The friend exchange here is amusing and there seems no offense taken by the male being called such names. It is possible though others may be offended or concerned about the name calling, though unlikely. Possibly someone may be not offended or distressed by the exchange or insinuation of sexual preference, but may take offense at the use of the word slut.

It can be seen here that the rules for friendship interaction may differ considerably between Facebook friends according to their accepted relationship with each other. Unless the friends have known each other before joining Facebook and friending each other, other friends often have to read the posts for a time and know the personal lives and beliefs of their Facebook friend to know if it is a joke or not.

**Example 3: When a Facebook friend posts private information**

A challenging dilemma is if a Facebook friend posts something highly personal. If there has been something like a crime or some other distress the user has experienced and posted, the Facebook friends will most likely support that friend. The boundary, however, between

distress and gossip is problematic. This example (Nycyk, 2015a, p. 26) is extreme, but the friend's decision to post private information may cause different outcomes. Some friends may be thankful towards the friend that the husband is disclosed to many as having an affair. They may feel it is a warning to others and it is justified. Other friends may choose not to comment at all for fear of being seen to be taking sides while others may be outraged that something private has been disclosed, possibly unfrinding her for doing so:

Who's idiot husband sends his mistress Valentine's Day flowers through UPS where his wife works? MINE! We've been separated for over 2 years but have been working on the marriage on and off, and he texts me every night good night and said Love you...I took back seat to 4 affairs with him. I know that makes me look totally dumb but I'm a kind hearted person, who believes people can change...So ladies if your man goes to LA Fitness you better warn him to stay away from the town slut that's a personal trainer there! I heard from many people she: Gives more rides than a Taxi. Gives more turns than a door knob. She's open like a 7 eleven...Hopefully he shares this post with his whore too, who is by the way married with 5 sons. Oh and yes I did contact her husband about the flowers, because he has every right to know!

This type of posted gossip can provoke anxiety in others about what to decide to do about continuing the friendship, but might also be seen by some as exciting and by others as bringing together other friends in a sense of solidarity (Jaworski & Coupland, 2005; Haviland, 1977). From these three examples, to keep Facebook friendships as positive and supportive as possible, the friend has to decide to what extent they are willing to post content that may damage the friendship and cause unfrinding and blocking to occur. This is why interaction rules are important to be aware of to avoid possibly being unfrinded by someone.

There are many reasons reported as to why it may be difficult to keep Facebook friendships. These act as behaviour markers, of what to be aware of that the Facebook user may do to cause people to unfrind them. Eddie (2020) identifies some factors that can affect relationships between Facebook friends:

- Jealously - friends may become jealous of posts that show the friend in a happy relationship and the friend is not
- Oversharing Information - sharing too much information about any topic, or posting too many photos can be seen by friend as showing off or trying to cultivate an image of happiness and success
- Loss of Communication - this is often given as a reason for culling friends when friends do not respond to friend's posts, although the higher number of friends the less likely it is to be able to respond to so many posts
- Possibility of Infidelity - this is a common occurrence, but it is also possible to have a strictly online relationship which can still alienate friends and damage significant offline relationships

Machin (2016, p. 174) argues that one aspect that harms Facebook friends is to openly criticise other Facebook friends on the platform or allow other friends to do so. As he states:

Criticism occurs when Friends make denigrating comments either publicly or privately, cast judgements on a person's family or Friends, or engages in public disagreement. These types of behaviours were perceived as other people not valuing the relationship that was shared, particularly when...done in the public arena rather than privately.

This example's text below is an extreme example of one Facebook friend openly criticising another, with other friends joining in to defend the Facebook friend from the criticism:



Such interactions are common on Facebook. The friend may have been honest in their comment, but the criticism is prejudicial and abusive. This opening-up honestly reveals them to perhaps not be a good Facebook friend and becomes a 'turn-off' to other friends viewing the post (Eddie, 2020). But having Facebook friends despite the amount of work it takes to maintain them is still overall a positive aspect of using the platform.

### Facebook Friending Research

Researchers have been preoccupied with exploring online friendships and their place in contemporary society. If having Facebook friends is a positive experience, or is supposed to be, what factors account for this? Does age, gender, cultural background or other demographic factors have an influence in friending people? Researchers use several methods

to find these out, although survey research is usually the most used method. In this section, 10 research studies are examined to show what insights this research brings.

An important issue to consider is that many studies use younger people, usually under 30 years of age, and often university students because that is the most available population to access to collect data. This can make it difficult to generalise Facebook friend behaviour in the general population, but still gives the reader information about what is occurring in this field. As an overview, results from many years, and using different research methods, do tend to show consistent types of results. People will mostly gravitate towards friending people that they know or share common interests with. Some people do try to friend others based on physical beauty or on the power and reputation of the friend. In Table 7 a selection of studies using various research methods show the positive aspects found of making and having Facebook friends:

Table 7  
*Facebook friends research examples*

<b>Researcher/s Names &amp; Year of Study</b>	<b>Results Suggesting Positive Aspects of having Facebook Friends and Why People Friend who they do</b>
Hoffman (2008)	Use of Facebook allows for a level of intensity that is high enough to meet traditional notions of community and encourages friendship making (2008).
Richardson & Hessey (2009)	Facebook allows users to remain connected to individuals who they would not have remained connected to. Rather than diminishing social interaction, Facebook offers people more choice in how they do continue relationships (p. 35).
Bucher (2012)	The accumulation and number of friends thus becomes the only way through which a meaningful Facebook existence can be realized. This is the law of network effects upon which social networking sites hinge. The more people are using it, the more useful it gets (p. 484).
Vallor (2012)	Complete friendships of virtue are, by their very nature, rare treasures, so it is not surprising that most uses of online social media are aimed at facilitating friendships of pleasure and utility (p. 197).
McEwan (2013)	Individuals felt more relational satisfaction, more closeness, and liked their friend more when both they and their friend take the time to show they care about each other via Facebook. Caring messages maybe reserved for those with whom we have close and satisfying relationships. Taking the time to send a targeted relational message may indicate a deeper and closer relationship.
Jensen & Sørensen (2013)	Almost all respondents, even the younger ones, might be characterized as cautious, sensible users, contrary to the

	media hype that in particular young people are relentlessly revealing everything online and thus might get in trouble with work, family and friends (p. 60).
Vătămănescu (2014)	Some Facebook users meet through common interest groups and consider it 'natural' to make and accept friend requests.
Kucukemiroglu & Kara (2015)	Facebook friends can recommend products and services and opinions that help friends to make decisions is highly valued.
Niland, Lyons, Goodwin & Hutton (2015)	Facebook was used to evoke and reinforce the enjoyment and investment of friendship through activities such as funny comments, 'likes 'and tags. Friendship protection was also used when friends filtered photos to protect each other's privacy within a wider audience (p. 134).
Farci, Rossi, Boccia & Giglietto (2017)	Facebook users, as emerges from every quote, are constantly aware of their audience with regard to the content they upload. Thanks to this awareness, people can develop selective public spaces for intimate relationships based on personal attraction and mutual interests (p. 793).

Some of these reported results, and conclusions based on them, are common findings. They all suggest a side of Facebook friending where despite the need to be cautious and the fragility of these friendships, it can be a rewarding platform to use. People may be very busy with their work, university or school lives, but may enjoy seeing how those they met years ago are progressing in life. Although perhaps a negative outlook on friends, Bauman (2003) is right in saying, unlike a 'real' relationship the virtual relationship is easy to enter but also to exit or discard.

One finding from Lima, Marques, Muiños and Camilo (2017) based on their study of Facebook friends takes a cautionary stance on relying on Facebook friends as real friends:

Face-to-face friends, with whom we interact in physical settings or through a variety of means, and with whom we can establish caring and close relationships, are fundamental for our health and well-being. Hence, the possibility of living a "second life" in a digital context, where multiple social media networks co-exist, is an interesting possibility, but one that should be regarded with great caution.

Such a consideration should not deter people from having Facebook friends, but the questioning of this type of friendship will still be ongoing.

### **Conclusion of Facebook Friends as a Positive Use of Facebook**

Having Facebook friends can be a rewarding part of using the platform and if used well provides a positive experience for all involved. This section, though acknowledging some pitfalls of online friendships, emphasised Facebook as a positive platform for these interactions. As a personal observation, I agree that perhaps the Facebook friend is not a 'real' friend, but many are comfortable with this arrangement to not meet the person off line.

If such friendships are to them real then that is their choice. The large body of literature has documented the advantages and disadvantages well that illustrates the world of Facebook friendships. What is agreed upon by researchers is, Facebook, and all social media networking sites, has changed the nature of the word friend and what society understands that to be.

## Facebook Groups

Part of the invention of the Internet was to bring groups together to share information and common interests. Facebook Groups has become since its launch in 2004 a highly used feature on the platform. Although there have been controversies around hate groups and other types of groups, being able to connect with those that are interested in the same topics as you are is enticing. In this section the positive aspects of Facebook Groups are discussed. These groups are types of virtual communities that offer the ability for people to voice views, share interests, be supported by others and find information. In this section, a short discussion of virtual community history that influenced the creation of Facebook groups occurs, followed by defining groups, examples of groups and an exploration of the positive aspects of groups.

### Virtual Community History - What Led to Facebook Groups?

Facebook groups have their origins in one of the most used applications on the Internet, the virtual community. The research on Internet groups is large and complex, but one argument that frequently occurs is how to define the word community. A definition of a community is (MacQueen et al., 2001, p. 1929):

A common definition of community emerged as a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings.

The arrival of Internet technologies meant people were no longer tied to slow communication or physical meetings to find out information or share opinions. The virtual community became a well-used online space to do this.

Defining a virtual community follows the traditional definition of community, differing in using electronic technology jargon to highlight its difference to physical community. A technical definition is given by Jones (1997) as it being a computer-mediated space where there is an integration of content and communication with an emphasis on member-generated content. Using other authors' views, Ridings and Gefen (2004) offer this detailed definition:

Virtual communities have been characterized as people with shared interests or goals for whom electronic communication is a primary form of interaction (Dennis, Poothari & Natarajan, 1998), as groups of people who meet regularly to discuss a subject of interest to all members (Figallo, 1998), and groups of people brought together by shared interests or a geographic bond (Kilsheimer, 1997).

Ridings (2005) is correct that not every virtual community is an actual community, for many over time, especially with the development of Facebook Groups and other social media platforms, became abandoned or used less. Jones (1997) describes a virtual community as a 'virtual settlement' suggesting that although people will only use it for their needs for a set

time period, other people do settle in them over a long time period, hence they need to be kept free of people who violate the rules of the community to continue its existence.

Lake (2009), on reflecting on the early times of virtual communities, stated the different types of them as:

- Bulletin Board Systems
- E-Mail Discussion Lists
- Group Chat such as Internet Relay Chat
- Multiuser Dungeons, Massively Multiplayer Online Games/Virtual Worlds
- Usenet

An example of a virtual community still in existence in 2020 is the aviation message board Jetspotter.com:



AVIATION FORUMS	TOPICS	POSTS	LAST POST
<b>Adelaide</b> Aircraft Information, Arrivals & Departures	499	5984	by MichaelC Sat Oct 19, 2019 9:37 pm
<b>Brisbane</b> Aircraft Information, Arrivals & Departures.	1838	17492	by Pieter Jansen Wed Jan 30, 2019 8:05 am
<b>Cairns</b> Aircraft Information, Arrivals & Departures.	42	1009	by steve-b Mon Mar 06, 2017 4:18 pm

Figure 76. Example of a virtual community (Jetspotter.com, 2020)

Figallo (1998) suggested members of these types of virtual communities felt a part of community, forming relationships and bonds of trust with other members, which led to exchanges and interactions that bring value to members' lives. Although the virtual community differs from the physical type and is seen as not being intimate in a closeness context, there is a major identified advantage of closeness from using them. Feelings of closeness develop due to shared interests not shared social characteristics or physical appearance, especially one's gender or socioeconomic status (Wellman & Gulia, 1999). This has been challenged in the visual culture of photos that exists in Facebook Groups.

Virtual communities', and Facebook Groups', interactions are said to be weak ties, may not be permanent relationships and are very different from strong ties such as friends and family. However, sociologist Granovetter (1973), in a widely cited article<sup>9</sup> that is often seen in virtual community research, argues that weak ties can be just as valuable in one's life. They are just different in them not being as intimate or close. For example, in Facebook Groups



information sharing, many forms of support and the ability to organise offline activities are usually done with those the user has weaker ties with. These are not the people they spend the majority of their life with, yet can be just as important as those people they have strong ties, such as family, with.

A prominent virtual communities' researcher in this area is Harold Rheingold. The weak ties are encouraged by the advantage of being anonymous, an affordance Facebook Groups does not allow unless the user uses a fake profile. In his book *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, he strongly argues that these, at the time, new technologies fulfil a very real need for humanity, and that community in the virtual online space actually is one. In this extract he states how these communities give a voice to those who are shy or introverted (Rheingold, 1993, p. 23-24):

Some people - many people - don't do well in spontaneous spoken interaction, but turn out to have valuable contributions to make in a conversation in which they have time to think about what to say. These people, who might constitute a significant proportion of the population, can find written communication more authentic than the face-to-face kind. Who is to say that this preference for one mode of communication - informal written text - is somehow less authentically human than audible speech? Those who critique (computer mediated communication) CMC because some people use it obsessively hit an important target, but miss a great deal more when they don't take into consideration people who use the medium for genuine human interaction.

The conclusion is that the virtual community has influenced the later generations of electronic platforms, especially Facebook Groups. There is a rich history and a large body of literature that makes interesting reading and shows how Facebook wanted to continue to connect people in the same way as the virtual communities did for decades.

### **Facebook Groups as Positive Places to Join and Participate In**

To reiterate, Facebook Groups are where users (including corporate or non-profit organisations) set up a group for people to join and share information with and support others. A formal definition of them is by technology website Bobology (2020) is:

A Facebook Group is a community of Facebook users who share a common interest. Just like groups of any kind, Facebook Groups are organized around families, activities, schools, religious organizations, work, projects, specific events or any other common interests such as fan clubs and political ideologies. Groups are an excellent way to create a community of people who share a common interest, but instead of meeting in person, the group meets and communicates using Facebook, instead of face-to-face.

An effective description of them is offered by Baatarjav, Phithakkitnukoon & Dantu (2008, p. 212) stating the function of Facebook Groups as:

Groups were created to support and discuss causes, beliefs, fun activities, sports, science, and technology. In addition, some of the groups have absolutely no meaningful purpose, but just for fun. Our research shows that the groups are self-organized, such that users with similar characteristics, which distinguishes one

group from others. The members' characteristics are their profile features, such as time zone, age, gender, religion, political view, etc, so members of the group have some contributions to their group identity. The group members' characteristics shape characteristic of the Group.

This description also highlights how different Facebook Groups are to previous virtual communities. When you join, depending on your Facebook profile settings, much about you such as the characteristics the authors' mention may be visible. Real names to be used as a requirement mark the main difference between Facebook Groups and earlier virtual communities where nicknames were often used in place of one's real name.

In Chapter One types of groups were discussed. Here these are reiterated to show that Facebook Groups have different privacy types depending on the topic. These are (Gebhart, 2017):

Public groups are just what they sound like: public. Anyone can see the group's name, location, member list, and posts, and the group can show up in anyone's searches or News Feed. Anyone can add themselves as a member without any invite or approval.

Closed groups are more confusing. A Closed group's name, description, and member list are not at all "closed," but are publicly visible. Closed groups may even show up in a search publicly. Overall, they are just as open as Public groups, except for three main differences: (1) new members must ask to join or be invited by a member, rather than just adding themselves; (2) only current members can see the content of group posts; and (3) only current members can see the group in their News Feed.

Secret groups are the most private of the three types. No aspect of a Secret group is publicly visible, new members must be added or invited by current members to join, and only members can see the content of group posts. However, former members who have voluntarily left the group can still find the group in search and see its name, description, tags, and location.

It is important to be aware of the levels of groups because some groups while private still allow non-members to see who is in the group. This can be awkward if you do not want others to know you are in a particular group. The Administrators (Admins) do state in private groups not to share posts outside the group. Although that is mostly adhered to, by using Snipping Tool software or copy and pasting the post, postings can be shared from private groups to others, so there is still some risk that the post will be seen outside that group. A degree of trust, vital to virtual communities of any type, is assumed and people will think that this will not happen. Admins will usually ban people for doing such acts.

In examining the positive elements of Facebook Groups, being able to share information and get support are main reasons why people join them. Sharing information can be anything, with examples being: photos, recommending a product or service, telling others how problems were overcome or organising offline meetings. This depends on the type of group it is. To illustrate, I asked a Facebook friend for some general comments regarding why they joined Facebook Groups. I wanted to know the types of groups they liked, if they were

worried about any issues with being in them and what they got out of the groups. The three responses were:

1. I am in a few Facebook groups i.e. cat groups, a group that remembers things from our childhood in Australia, Community groups and a hobby group, old houses and derelict buildings.
2. Not really concerned about using my real name in these groups, coz I know that if anyone hassles me, I can report them and block them.
3. Great memories from my childhood Sometimes advice if I need it. Sense of being involved, especially in the community groups and again some advice or help when asked and also being able to help others when I can. From the animal groups funny pictures so laughter and a feeling of calmness and heart warming.

This suggests they are getting enjoyment out of participating in the group by sharing with others who have the same interests.

Some groups provide online support for physical and emotional health issues. They are not supposed to be a substitute for medical advice, but are often groups of highly emotional and distressing posts seeking help and relief from many problems. They also offer not only support but information that may assist in seeking solutions. Examples of such groups include: health conditions, depression and anxiety, relationship discussions and overcoming any forms of abuse. For example, one group offers support for anyone affected by the Holocaust in World War Two. In a study showing the group dynamics, Menyhért (2017, p. 366) states the ethos of the Facebook Group *The Holocaust and My Family* is:

In this digital community, remembering is a tool with which to mobilize memories in order to build a host forum which makes it possible to share memories. The group aims to further the sharing of memories within the community and form a shared communal identity. The name of the group, which includes the word “family,” is expressive of the intention to deal with the past on a family/community memory level. This is a gesture of inclusion via family history, accepting macro history via micro-history, in order to gain access to the micro-histories of others so as to interlink members and develop a network which can collectively approach a past which had been closed off from them by silence and tabooing.

Therefore, Facebook Groups like this one serves as a place to cater for diverse needs and interests. The first one is a group in Brisbane, Australia promoting making friends. Figure 77 shows a post inviting members to a picnic. This allows the group members to decide if they want to potentially meet new friends outside of the Facebook Group:



Figure 77. Group invitation (Actual Friendships Brisbane, 2000)

Hobby and interest groups are abundant on Facebook, catering to many types of interests. Figure 78 is a post in a knitting and crocheting hobby group showing a member of the group has knitted a blanket. This type of post is a ‘show and tell’ one which is common in Facebook Groups. The motivation for the group member to post can be anything, not necessarily attention-seeking. People responded with praise to this post:



Figure 78. Post in a hobby Facebook group (Stone, 2020)

Figure 79 is an interest group that posts about anything considered old that exists in Australia. The boundary of this group is that the post and photos must have been taken in Australia

only. In this post, a photo of an old vintage car appears with others discussing, praising and asking questions to the group member who posted it:



Figure 79. Post in special interest group (Hall, 2020)

This encourages community, as does Figure 78, in posting content that stimulates discussion as well as questioning and praising the user who posted it. The gratification people received from participation, while individual, is expressed through the likes as well as the comments. In this case, at the time of collecting this image, 243 liked type responses were made by other members.

Facebook groups can also be used by professionals in any area to share ideas, information and even provide networks for members to find employment. The next example is a professional financial group that discusses risks and rewards of investing. Figure 80 shows member has posted an article on cryptocurrencies:

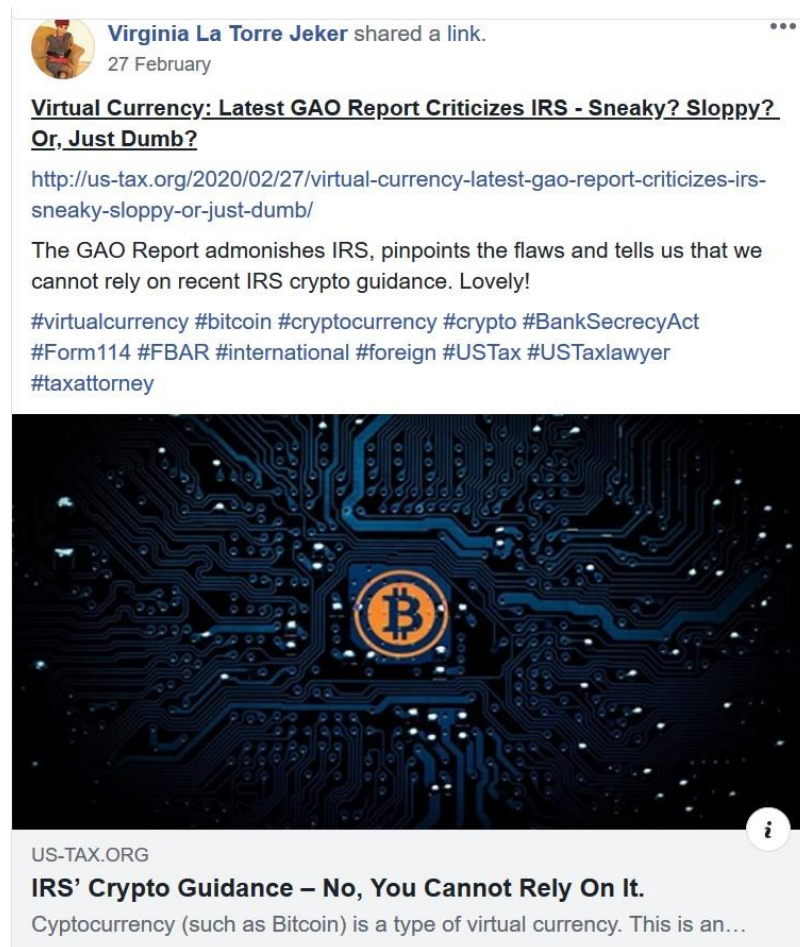


Figure 80. Financial post in a Facebook Group (La Torre Jeker, 2020)

A large number of people join groups to obtain support for physical and emotional conditions. Depression and anxiety groups are abundant on Facebook. Figure 81<sup>10</sup> shows a supportive exchange between two people in a depression group:

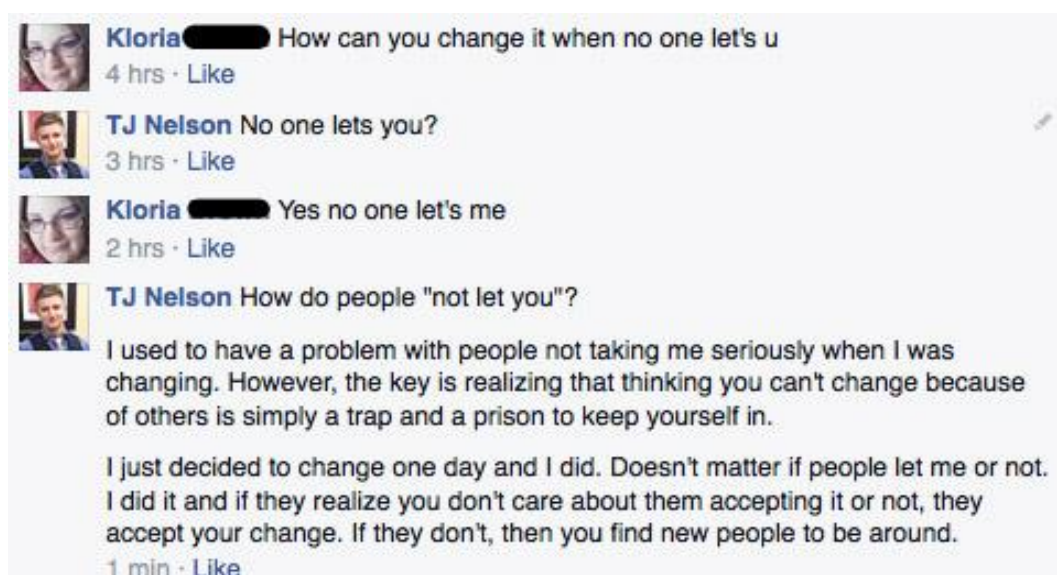


Figure 81. Depression group exchange (Nelson, 2018)

## Rules, Behaviours and Standards in Facebook Groups

Facebook Groups operate under a set of rules decided by the person who creates the group, the administrator or group owner, in conjunction with appointed members who are called moderators. Both of these roles make the decision to approve postings, moderate content so it conforms to the group's rules and warn or ban people who break the group's rules. As an observation, although conflict can happen in any group, the group's type usually determines the probability of name calling or arguing behaviours. The administrator and moderator also use their discretion in managing the group. A member of the group may cause issues but go unpunished, whereas someone may be removed from the group for a once only angry comment.

In this section a discussion of the operations of how people conduct themselves in groups in obeying and following rules is undertaken. Groups are often run as if they are like the offline world. Depending on the nature of the group, what can be posted is subject to rules. Figure 82 is an example of a Facebook Group's rules that those want to join this group must agree to and follow:

### Group rules from the admins

- 1 **1. No Hate Speech or Bullying** ...  
We want everyone to feel safe at all times .Bullying of any kind & any degrading comments on issues such as race, religion, culture, sexual orientation, gender or identity will NOT be tolerated.
- 2 **2. Be Kind and Courteous** ...  
Working together we can create a warm,welcoming & safe environment.Treat everyone with respect. Healthy debates are natural but keep in mind that there are times to just agree to disagree
- 3 **3. No Promotions or Spam** ...  
NO Self-promotion by means of posts or links to personal blogs or youtube etc .No spam .Links to other groups or sites are NOT permitted without prior Admin approval.
- 4 **4. Respect Everyone's Privacy** ...  
Mutual trust is an integral part of the group . The nature of this group means at times very sensitive & personal information is shared .Be respectful..what's shared in this group STAYS in the group.
- 5 **5. No inappropriate private messages** ...  
NO private messaging members unless permission has been given ..This is NOT a dating site & any member found using the group for that purpose will be immediately removed & blocked from the group

*Figure 82.* Rules to join a Facebook Group example (Anxiety/Depression Australia, 2020)

Civility is highly valued in groups because there may be members who want to cause problems for the group with inappropriate posts and arguing. A term that has been used for

decades since people started using the Internet is Netiquette. This is short for network etiquette, the code of conduct regarding acceptable online behaviour (Marketing Terms.com, 2018). These are both the formal rules that are shown in Figure 82, and unspoken or taken-for-granted rules. For example, it would be reasonable to state that in a hobby group getting off topic would be discouraged. Groups may forbid the discussion of religion, politics or negative current affairs topics, such as terrorism.

As an example of netiquette Australian organisation Playgroup New South Wales (NSW) set out guidelines in response to parents and carers of children who wanted to create Facebook Groups to communicate with each other. The organisation set out more Netiquette rules for forming a group that further reflect the comprehensive rules people need to follow before joining. These rules also exist in conjunction with Facebook's Community rules. The group suggested the following rules be in place before the administrator added a member (Playgroup NSW, n.d.):

- Profane, defamatory, offensive or violent language
- “Trolling”, or posting deliberately disruptive statements meant to hijack comment threads or throw discussions off-track
- Attacks on specific groups or any comments meant to harass, threaten or abuse an individual
- Hateful or discriminatory comments regarding race, ethnicity, religion, gender, disability, sexual orientation or political beliefs
- Spam, link baiting or files containing viruses that could damage the operation of other people's computers or mobile devices
- Acknowledgement of intent to stalk an individual or collect private information without disclosure
- Commercial solicitations or promotion of a competitor
- Violations of copyright or intellectual property rights
- Content that relates to confidential or proprietary business information
- Content determined to be inappropriate, in poor taste, or otherwise contrary to the purposes of the forum

These comprehensive rules may be difficult to implement, but to keep the Facebook Group civil and positive, they are often necessary to be agreed to in the group's joining rules.

Moderating Facebook Group content is intensive, requiring diligent enforcement of boundaries. This practice has been challenging for many years. Since the early days of virtual communities, enforcement of rules has clashed with Freedom of Speech arguments. Groups are somewhat different in this regard to early virtual communities because public visibility of profiles is higher than the use of nicknames and avatars that was the accepted way of interacting in virtual communities. What is acceptable posting, while members must abide by



such group rules, depends on many factors. For example, someone may criticise a photo on a post, but if it is seen as constructive it may be left in the group, but if abusive it may be removed.

Conflict over what should or should not be posted continues online and has occurred in Facebook Groups. To illustrate this tension between conflicting ideas of what to post, Julian Dibbell wrote a well-known essay about the problems he saw in the governance of an early text only virtual community he was a part of. The community was invaded by a troll who typed messages that were offensive and threatening. Part of the issue though was some members who saw the posted messages did not see the need for greater controls to be implemented. Dibbell (1993) recounts this problem which is still a common dilemma that exists in how to manage Facebook Groups that are trolled:

Faced with the task of inventing its own self-governance from scratch, the LambdaMOO population had so far done what any other loose, amorphous agglomeration of individuals would have done: they'd let it slide. But now the task took on new urgency. Since getting the wizards to toad Mr. Bungle (or to toad the likes of him in the future) required a convincing case that the cry for his head came from the community at large, then the community itself would have to be defined; and if the community was to be convincingly defined, then some form of social organization, no matter how rudimentary, would have to be settled on. And thus, as if against its will, the question of what to do about Mr. Bungle began to shape itself into a sort of referendum on the political future of the MOO.

Arguments broke out on \*social and elsewhere that had only superficially to do with Bungle (since everyone agreed he was a cad) and everything to do with where the participants stood on LambdaMOO's crazy-quilty political map. Parliamentarian legalist types argued that unfortunately Bungle could not legitimately be toaded at all, since there were no explicit MOO rules against rape, or against just about anything else -- and the sooner such rules were established, they added, and maybe even a full-blown judiciary system complete with elected officials and prisons to enforce those rules, the better. Others, with a royalist streak in them, seemed to feel that Bungle's as-yet-unpunished outrage only proved this New Direction silliness had gone on long enough, and that it was high time the wizardocracy returned to the position of swift and decisive leadership...

In this case, Dibbell described that people have different attitudes towards dealing with trolling. In one study of YouTube which faced the same issues as Facebook Groups, it was found that deciding on the boundaries of language was important to clarify (Nycyk, 2016). For example, certain swear words such as 'bloody' in some groups would likely not cause any offense. Again, it is important to state that to keep Facebook Groups civil is up to all involved. The member must abide by the rules, but the administrator and moderator in enforcing such rules must explain to the group or member what language or content is inappropriate.

Raquel (2017) argues though that moderators and administrators may become overzealous, controlling the group and making unfair rulings. They have power over who decides to enter and stay in the group. Examples Raquel states is unfair on group members include:

- The second I (Raquel's words) enter a group that has a 1,000-word group description or pinned post with a million rules, I will click "Leave Group" and bounce out of there like Tigger, because I feel suffocated. I feel like I'm already going to be sentenced to solitary confinement if I break one of your precious rules
- Silencing people who disagree with the administrator
- Blocking large amounts of people from the group for no specific reason

Conflicts may occur between the administrator and moderator of the group making being in that group unpleasant. Concurrently, the group may need to be protected and not allowing certain types of content or language to appear in the group is necessary. The group is bound also by Facebook's rules including hate speech, and it has removed posts within groups that moderators have not.

### **Conclusion of Facebook Groups as a Positive Use of Facebook**

Facebook Groups provide Facebook users with an excellent forum to participate in. Such groups have a large range of interests that inform, support, share information and may provide the organisation of offline meetings to occur. The administration and moderation of these groups is challenging with a clash between Freedom of Speech and adherence to group rules often occurring. If they are used with consideration for other group members Facebook Groups is a valuable part of Facebook's offerings.

### **Conclusions and Summary**

In this chapter three specific positive uses of Facebook were discussed: education, friends and Facebook groups. The three areas that were selected were done so to illustrate that Facebook can be an online platform to received support, share information and meet other people. With each individual use, an overall conclusion is:

- Facebook and Education - Facebook can provide a place where students learn, collaborate, get support and find resources to help them succeed or improve in their study path.
- Facebook Friends - Friends can be made on Facebook from friends they known offline to strangers, which can potentially be a way of sustaining friendships and meeting new people.
- Facebook Groups - These can be rewarding to participate in by sharing common interests and obtaining personal or emotional support, as well as having a voice in sharing and participating in such a group.

While this chapter did consider some negative aspects that existed in all three of these areas, Chapter 4 discusses these issues in greater depth.

## Notes

- 1 Harper, T. (2014). How social should learning be? Facebook as a learning management system. In M. Kent & T. Leaver (Eds.) *An education in Facebook?: Higher education and the world's largest social network* (pp. 81-89). London: Routledge.
- 2 Personal communication from Roger, surname withheld by request.
- 3 Personal communication from Tracey surname withheld by request.
- 4 Personal communication from Roger, surname withheld by request.
- 5 Personal communication from Tracey surname withheld by request.
- 6 Although Ito et al. focus on youth in their book, hence its use in this quote, for this book a student can be of any age.
- 7 Quote page number for Akcaoglu and Bowman's article is from In Press article, reference list shows the full published article details.
- 8 All examples are taken from public posts and have had much detail masked to minimise identification.
- 9 Granovetter's article published in *The American Journal of Sociology* in 1973 has been widely used to argue that weak ties to those online can be just as meaningful to the individual as strong family and friends' ties. Just because someone is online only does not mean a tie or bond cannot be made with that person. This paper can be difficult to read but it has been influential in explaining that ties in life are not always just about those physically around us.
- 10 Because Facebook depression and anxiety groups are private, Figure 80 has been obtained from the World Wide Web.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## NEGATIVE USES OF FACEBOOK

### **Facebook Trolling:**

Sunday: Still on Facebook, Devil Mandy had the knives out for a friend who had recently had a nose job. She had been very public about her reasons for having the surgery and most of her friends were writing about how great she looked. But not Devil Mandy. Can you guess what this troll had to say about her former friend's 'after photo?'

It looks even worse than your old nose. - Libby-Jane Charleston, 9Honey<sup>1</sup>

### **Facebook Addiction:**

Facebook allows us to connect with others. As social animals we absolutely need human contact for emotional and psychological health. Consequently, we are hard-wired to seek connections with others. Facebook makes establishing these connections easier than any time in human history. Everything on Facebook is designed to establish more and more connections with others. Whether it is tagging photos, finding mutual friends, getting status updates, joining specific Facebook groups, sharing lists, or playing games, the goal is always the same - make a human connection. This universal need for human connection is a likely a driving force for those who find themselves addicted to Facebook. - Dr. Brent Conrad, TechAddiction<sup>2</sup>

### **Facebook Live Streaming Issues:**

The horrific attack in Christchurch in March caused something of a reckoning for Facebook and the broader tech industry as people grappled with the horror of what happened, but also the fact that the perpetrator was able to livestream what was happening and share it faster than the industry could react.- John Kennedy, Silicon Republic<sup>3</sup>

Facebook is where humans interact globally with each other as they bring their own beliefs and behaviours to the platform. The mass media has since Facebook's release reported many issues that have caused concern for Facebook users, governments across the world, the law and the general community. There is a sense of helplessness with what is occurring in society and the outlet for anger is posting on Facebook. Sinister things are posted as well such as racism, sexism, homophobia, violent acts and destroying of reputations. People may enjoy arguing and promoting their individual agendas on it. The negative side of Facebook is a part of this platform that needs to be explored regardless of how unpleasant it is.

This chapter examines the negative side of Facebook to appreciate the complex difficulties the platform has to allow free speech without increasing censorship. To appreciate the overall effect of negativity, a discussion of its effects and why it occurs begins the chapter. Trolling, arguing and cyberbullying are discussed with examples of five issues that inflame these behaviours on Facebook posts. Facebook addiction is examined as it is a substantial problem many users face. The issue of appropriate content for Facebook Live is discussed especially

its use in broadcasting violent or other controversial events. Finally, some other negative issues users experience is reported. Much of what is discussed in this chapter plays a role in Facebook users limiting their postings on it and also contributes to them closing their accounts.

### Why Does Negativity Exist on Facebook?

The section provides ideas as to why negativity exists on Facebook. The Facebook user can disengage from the platform in many ways. They may choose to avoid the Facebook newspaper pages where much disagreement and simplistic, often violent, arguments exist or not follow the friends they know post negative content on their own Facebook walls. It can be difficult to not react to posts that make the user angry and post negative, insulting and threatening posts back at those users.

Negative posts do impact on a user's willingness to use Facebook. Seeing posts where one feels helpless, such as friends posting they are depressed and suicidal, are distressing. People fighting with partners or friends cause awkwardness when they post their arguments on Facebook as illustrated briefly in Chapter Three. In this extract an interchange between two people whose relationship had broken up was posted publically, causing some degree of discomfort for others reading it, with one other person posting a comment supporting the original author of it who said they are now single (Nycyk, 2015a, p. 28):

Author 1: Is single

Author 2: Don't like this, bitch.

Author 1: i love u but we can't do this any longer

Author 2: You are SO PATHETIC

Author 1: U never really cared about me u wanted me to leave anyway don't say  
you didn't want this

Author 2: All you wanted from me was sex

Author 1: Yeah and did I ever get it maybe once or twice a man has needs

Author 2: Yeah, well maybe if you didn't have sex with my best friend I would  
have more.

Author 3: Was his (male genitalia) size a factor?

Author 1: Oh yeah...I don't like having sex with something I have to put under a  
microscope to see.

This interchange is unpleasant and the user's Facebook friends may question if they want to remain seeing such posts.

A function of social media is to engage its audiences to return to it and keep using it. The platforms have had along held belief that they are merely hosts, not publishers of information. Wanting to read meaningful and interesting comment rather than see friends post trivial or argumentative posts is because the user does not want to see the banality or drama posted. Mayo (2020, p. 62), drawing on Rao (2012) and Vervaeke et al. (2017), accurately describe this problem of Facebook's banality:

For the user, this means that instead of a newspaper feeding us daily doses of shared knowledge "we get a nauseating mix of news from forgotten classmates,

slogan-placards about issues trivial and grave, revisionist histories coming at us via a million political voices, the future as a patchwork quilt of incoherent glimpses, all mixed in with the pictures of cats doing improbable things” (Rao, 2012).

This experience is compounded, as one incidence folds into another, then another; each intersecting with one another, each incrementally affecting the other, seeming to accelerate and expatiate with every moment. This barrage weakens our aptitude for discernment (Vervaeke et al., 2017). As such, we are yet to develop the wherewithal to effectively solve the perennial problems of life - largely because we are plagued by ignorance and uncertainty.

This description suggests the types of banal content and issues that is responsible for leaving or reducing using Facebook. It is also suggested that the users may be so overwhelmed by Facebook content that they begin not to critically question the platform’s content.

To examine why users do reduce Facebook use and remove their accounts, a variety of reasons from users is given<sup>4</sup> by these authors showing the concerns users have about the negative aspects of using Facebook:

The notion of “oversharing” is discussed as an aspect of what Facebook has turned into, as users find their feeds clogged with information they find gratuitously personal and irrelevant (Whitehead, 2020).

I wish I could say I was motivated by a principled stand against the tech giant’s role in the spread of misinformation, or in the hollowing out of the media industry, but the truth is I wasn’t getting any value from the platform, and I finally realized that. Fewer and fewer of my friends use Facebook regularly (Palus, 2019).

Reacts like it are understandable sometimes but, they also have a line that we all need to be careful and conscious of. There's a point in all the witty take downs and opinions, justified or not, when all we're doing is mirroring the same behaviours and attitudes that we're calling out or giggling at.. and probably without realising...and that makes it hard to see and self reflect on. (Craig Mack, Sydney, Australia Social Media Influencer, 2020)

Leaving Facebook meant I could just do me. I now have to focus on my own life and what I really want. Since I’m no longer trying to uphold an image I want people to have of me, I’ve become more open to new possibilities. In the timeless words of Lao Tzu, “When I let go of what I am, I become what I might be.” Defensiveness and perfectionism fall away; open-mindedness remains. I practice finding silver linings and avoid being critical (Newman, 2018).

But to me, my personal and political motivations for quitting Facebook made these sacrifices worth it. I didn’t want Facebook algorithms or experiments influencing my happiness. I was tired of hearing about its many failures, resulting in ethnic clashes and election interference. For me, deleting Facebook was a political statement (De Silva, 2020).

When I finished work late yesterday I quickly jumped onto FB to check my messages & I couldn't believe the wave of darkness & sadness that suddenly engulfed me. As I scrolled down almost all the subjects I read in people's posts were about vaccinations, 5G, police state, arrests, protests, micro chipping, Bill Gates & action groups that were forming to protest against this & against that, etc etc. I just felt so engulfed with a feeling of hopelessness & despair it floored me. I went from the highest of highs to the lowest of lows in less than a minute (Laws, 2020).

Is social media just going to keep being an endless:

Trump says something, the media loses their mind, the same people on social media share and lose their mind...

Fights in the comments erupt between those who are angry, those who don't care, or those who read the actual article and don't see the big deal...

Wash, rings, repeat this next week...(and for the last 4 years and prob the next 4)

For a guy you all can't stand, (and quite frankly as an Australian isn't even your head of state) you all talk about him non stop to the point that every word consumes you. It's like that ex you just can't get over.

I wish there was a way for Facebook to filter out all boring political opinion and just give me the actual things I love seeing...I love seeing photos of my friends, what they are up to, jokes they're telling, what new things they have discovered that makes them happy. You know, the ACTUAL things that make people interesting.

There is a reason I don't post about politics or share articles online. It's boring, no one cares, and it just causes division.

\*starts writing letter to Zuckerberg to look into such filter\* (Facebook User comment, 2020).

These comments suggest that there is a large negative side to the platform. As Mayo (2020) and Sardar (2010) suggest, the digital world has created new ways to communicate to millions of people but it is a postnormal time to be living in. What this means is, Facebook has offered new ways of connection and information sharing, but what is considered 'normal' ways to communicate to others, arguing and trolling, is often seen as not having a consequence. Vaidhyanathan (2018, p. 5-6) is scathing of the way Facebook has developed as a communication platform in both the spread of hate and argument and its banality:

A second structural problem is that Facebook amplifies content that hits strong emotional registers, whether joy or indignation. Among the things that move fast and far on Facebook: cute puppies, cute babies, clever listicles, lifestyle quizzes, and hate speech. Facebook is explicitly engineered to promote items that generate strong reactions. If you want to pollute Facebook with nonsense to distract or propaganda to motivate, it's far too easy. The first step is to choose the most extreme, polarizing message and image.

Extremism will generate both positive and negative reactions, or “engagements.” Facebook measures engagement by the number of clicks, “likes,” shares, and comments. This design feature - or flaw, if you care about the quality of knowledge and debate - ensures that the most inflammatory material will travel the farthest and the fastest. Sober, measured accounts of the world have no chance on Facebook. And when Facebook dominates our sense of the world and our social circles, we all potentially become carriers of extremist nonsense.

These comments express user dissatisfaction with what is posted on Facebook with the disappointment in the platform evident in some way in all the authors’ comments.

### **An Explanation for Negativity - The Online Disinhibition Effect**

A theory suggested by John Suler, published in 2004, suggested six factors contribute to what he describes as the uncivil online behaviours that occur called the Online Disinhibition Effect (Suler, 2004)<sup>5</sup>. Two categories and six factors contribute to describing this behaviour. Although he describes some online behaviours as good, much online interaction consists of rude abusive behaviours, threats or anger. The first category he terms benign disinhibition whilst the second is called toxic disinhibition (Suler, 2004). Trolling, where people bait or provoke others with name calling, disrupt a Facebook post, threaten or deceive someone (Phillips 2015; Bishop 2012; Hardaker 2010), is abundant on the platform. At an extreme is the term cyberhate, where threatening, sexually explicit and violent rhetoric online behaviours occur often towards women (Jane, 2017) and that Facebook may classify as hate speech.

Suler lists six factors that describe reasons why toxic disinhibition occurs. These account for users who cause negativity on the platform in a way that is ‘morally disengaged’ from their victims (Bandura, 1999). These are (Learning Theories, 2020; Suler, 2004):

1. Dissociative Anonymity - Remaining anonymous means not owing one’s behaviour
2. Invisibility - As much Internet content is text inhibitions are lower as there is no physical presence with another
3. Asynchronicity - Online interactions are usually not in real time, so someone can post content and never return to view peoples’ reactions to them
4. Solipsistic introjection - Without face-to-face cues, you experience online messages as voices in your head and might assign imagined, and unrealistic, characteristics to another person based off of their messages and online persona
5. Dissociative imagination - When people consider the Internet to be a ‘game’ and normal societal or cultural rules do not operate online
6. Minimisation of Authority - People’s authority and status does not always exist online so they are not taken seriously by other users and have little power to change others’ online behaviours

Suler classifies these under the term human disembodiment. Underlying these ideas is that if someone is not there physically with you, you can do what you want to them without



consequences. The lack of appreciation of these consequences is present in trolling and cyberbullying<sup>6</sup> online behaviours. If content that is hurtful is posted, public humiliation contributes to the pain and suffering endured by the victim (Bauman, 2010). Those who are victims may have their lives, credibility, personal and other relationships, their brand image or chances of getting new employment damaged, with this often not appreciated by Facebook and Internet users (Peluchette & Karl, 2010).

### **Negative Facebook Behaviour Effects**

Scholars and media commentators have considered that the problem of negative interactions has damaged civility in society and the way people treat each other offline. One renowned Internet scholar Sherry Turkle has studied the consequences of constant online immersion. Her views align with Suler (2004) in that not having inhibitions online, as well as empathy and civility, has created a negative online environment causing people to feel unsafe using it. When interviewed about this issue she explained her view as pertaining to Facebook as (Npr.org, 2012):

It all stems from the same thing - which is that when we are face to face - and this is what I think is so ironic about Facebook being called Facebook, because we are not face to face on Facebook ... when we are face to face, we are inhibited by the presence of the other. We are inhibited from aggression by the presence of another face, another person. We're aware that we're with a human being. On the Internet, we are disinhibited from taking into full account that we are in the presence of another human being.

Facebook, especially newspaper pages, right wing groups and some right wing politicians thrive on public outrage and online, often public, lynching of people. Champoux Durgee and McGlynn (2012, p. 22) explain this why public outrage is often used by companies and journalists as a mass communication attention gathering strategy:

Harm, fear of harm and threatened values are the three basic sources of public outrage. Anger, often aimed at corporations, may be amplified by the public's perception of their relative powerlessness and observation of unfair, deceitful treatment. If a company's actions are high risk, while its public communication is unresponsive, squirrely or dishonest, fury is sure to follow. These days, anyone who tunes into the evening news or listens to a political speech receives an ear-full of fury. Many journalists, activists and political figures are in the "outrage business," dwelling on frightening topics that attract large audiences, advertising dollars and financial contributions.

Fake or leaked news can be deliberately posted to also incite outrage. Often people will fight with each other rather than engage in rational, respectful debate.

Terms are invented to describe Facebook's negative effects that become part of the platform's vehicular. A term that has emerged is cancel culture. This is described as a mostly online phenomenon where anyone can be ejected from their influence or fame by perceived questionable actions (Kepferle, 2020). Although associated primarily with celebrities, politicians and famous people it manifests as a form of a boycott when people often band together online to call out people and socially shame them for their behaviour. A further dimension is that it is to "mute" or to "cancel" to make that person's name irrelevant and to

erase them and all their accomplishments from history (Woods, 2019). The problem with it, especially when social media like Facebook is used, is the potential to destroy reputations and careers. It is not always limited to famous people receiving this treatment as other Facebook users can experience this.

It is considered that some people do deserve such online treatment. Mahan (2019) describes this phenomenon as:

Cancel Culture is one of the more complicated trends to hit the internet in recent years. Some argue that it's too harsh, others argue that it just doesn't have any real consequences. Certainly it has ruined people's reputations and chances at business opportunities, in many cases rightly so, but it has also created a mob-like mentality whereby any minuscule mistake makes it open season for intense backlash.

Using cancel culture has said to have had positive influences though which suggest there is some justification for its use. Luu (2019) states:

Perhaps more than anything else, cancel culture will be seen as an intrinsic part of life lived publicly in this decade, with the downfall of powerful Hollywood producers, racist and sexist comedians, white supremacists, and clueless corporations left in its wake. Cancel culture, not unlike cyberbullying, has also had its more "innocent" victims, ordinary citizens who said the unacceptable thing in a public forum. Is the destructive power of cancel culture too much?

However, this gives rise to a debate about how much, and to what extent, people should be shamed especially for past errors. Also does shaming and cancelling mean that person has not made amends for behaviours as apologies are often not accepted by Internet lynch mobs? For example, American actor and comedian Kevin Hart in 2019 did not address previous homophobic Twitter tweets resulting in him being replaced as host of the 2019 Academy Awards. In an interview he stated that although he acknowledged the attempt at cancel culture on his career, he also stated people should be given a second chance (Wionews, 2020).

It is a major challenge policing global social media platforms, but Facebook, as well as other platforms, have come under criticism for being slow to respond to negative and hateful content. Australian Journalist Ginger Gorman investigated Internet trolling and wrote *Troll Hunting: Inside the World of Online Hate and its Human Fallout*. In the book she criticises Facebook by her description of repeated meetings with the Australian office of the platform. Taking evidence of trolling and online hate, the meetings seemed to be met with indifference by Facebook's Australian management (Gorman, 2019). Facebook has addressed trolling, but the user needs to be aware of its presence and choose to engage or not with it, and know how to manage it should they experience it.

### **Examples of Negative Facebook Behaviours**

In a study by Cionea, Piercy and Carpenter (2017) their results suggested that individuals generally perceive Facebook arguments as a negative experience. Yet a glance over any posts in newspaper sections or political groups seems to contradict this. To illustrate these views, five examples of negative behaviours showing how certain topics cause mass

arguments are presented. In a study of Russian Facebook users, Bogolyubova et al. (2018) suggested it is possible that high levels of exposure to inflammatory political material online may play a disinhibiting role and unleash psychopathic tendencies in some individuals. These examples suggest this is an accurate assessment of some Facebook users. In these five Facebook examples they are public topics that do not involve direct relationships between arguing users that are displayed to the Facebook audience, which are usually different from private topic posts where users may know each other (Cionea, Piercy & Carpenter, 2017).

As a general guide, there are specific topics that have a topology that are likely to provoke arguing on Facebook. Table 8 displays the types of topics and some characteristics of those topics that encourage negative interactions between Facebook users:

Table 8

*Topic examples that influence negative responses on Facebook*

<b>Specific Topic Causing Negativity</b>	<b>Extra Dimensions of Topic</b>
Abortion and Euthanasia	Debates often religious in nature
Anti-vaccination Comments	Also called anti-vaxxers
Capital Punishment	For and against its use often not sufficiently debated on Facebook
Climate Change	Arguments between environmentalists and climate change deniers
Criminal Justice and the Law	Inadequate laws to protect citizens, inadequate and varied court sentences, judges seen as corrupt and handing out inadequate sentences, incarceration for crimes not seen as enough of a punishment
Culture Wars	Cultural conflicts between people and groups to assert dominance over others due to differing views and beliefs
Debates about Security and Privacy	“Nothing to hide” supporters and opponents of privacy, for example, citizen identity cards
Destruction of Natural and Built Habitats	Wildlife displaced, old held dear buildings demolished for redevelopment
Domestic Violence	Mostly towards women with increasing recognition of men and trans violence, arguments over men as perpetrators (can they really reform?) and judge’s sentences, the law and police actions being inadequate and not a deterrent
Famous People in any Industry	Celebrities, politicians, social media and online influences, actresses and actors, musicians,

	especially bad behaviours, application of cancel culture
Fear of Other Countries	Especially China, Russia, North Korea
Gender and Sex Debates	Trans and intersex discrimination, sex and gender being binary (not just male and female), teaching children about gender beyond two types, Safe Schools sex education in Australia criticised
Historical Issues	Denial of Holocaust or Apartheid, questioning minority groups' rights, removal of statutes during the 2020 United States race riots
Immigration and Multiculturalism	To and from countries, taking 'our jobs', in Australia 475 visas for overseas workers
Mental Illness	Perpetuation of mental illness as stigma when a crime is committed by someone living with such an illness, treatment of those living with mental health issues in society, ignorance over the differences between autism and mental illness
Politicians and Politics	Left, right and centre politics
Physical Looks	Weight, age, physical and mental disability, use of cosmetic surgery
Protesting and Public Demonstration	Hatred towards groups that disrupt daily life, association with veganism, hatred towards Extinction Rebellion and others seen as left-wing groups, eco-terrorists and burning a country's flag
Race and Racism	Very broad and not limited to one set of peoples, blaming races for the world's problems
Religion	Churches not paying tax, crimes against children under care of the church, quoting the Bible and sin in moral arguments, criticism of Christianity and Islamic faiths
Sexism and Misogyny	Especially against feminism, mainly women though male and transgender sexism occurs
Sexual Crimes and Paedophilia	Usually against children but also such acts towards animals and older people, domestic violence involving sexual abuse
Terrorism	People from certain areas in the world blamed for terrorist activities even though the terrorists are

	usually a small group within that country
--	---

Many of these topics generally involve disinhibited behaviours as defined by Suler (2004) and this loss of inhibition, lack of restraint and not being face-to-face with another can manifest as aggressive online behaviours (Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012).

## Five Examples of Negative Content

The following five examples demonstrate the negative aspects of using Facebook. They show five issues that inflame arguments and trolling. An analysis of these posts is also given. The five example topics are:

1. Marriage Equality
2. Anti-Vaxxers
3. Racism
4. Abortion
5. Left Right Wing Politics

Presented will be 5 posts by media and Facebook Groups that are publically posted and, as at time of writing this book, are still viewable on Facebook. These demonstrate interchanges that vary from sarcastic comment responses, arguing and name calling, trolling (as in disrupting the thread) and openly hostile aggression. There is a link between the topic and the chances of angry response comments occurring. I agree with Cionea, Piercy and Carpenter (2017) that the user making the comments has a persuasion goal of trying to change others' beliefs or position on a particular issue. The sense of 'I am right' and 'I am entitled to my opinion' is a fairly common practice in these arguments.

These posts have a number of disclaimers and privacy issues that are disclosed. First, the originator of the public post such as the page it came from is shown, but users' photo and names are masked. The reason for this is that there is no inference that the user is identified as a troll, cyberbully or racist, sexist or homophobic person. Second, it is unlikely the person could be identified as the commentator, so therefore the emphasis is on the comments to demonstrate negative Facebook behaviours.

### Example 1:

#### Marriage Equality in Australia and the Plebiscite

Australia for years did not allow same-sex marriage, refusing to change the Marriage Act and left and right wing political parties and some politicians saying marriage is between a man and a woman. In 2017 the then Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull called for a plebiscite, a vote on an issue from the voting public, to vote yes or no to changing the Marriage Act. The majority voted yes and same-sex marriage became legal on the 9<sup>th</sup> of December 2017.

Facebook became a central platform for bitter and divisive arguments with a user Facebook frame created stating 'It's OK To Say No'. What emerged during this time was many on both sides of the debate telling others what to do in having to vote yes or no. Those that refused to vote were vilified. Those that were anti marriage equality were concerned about the legal change it would bring, had religious beliefs that were fundamentalist and believed marriage only be between a man and woman, and those who had contempt for many reasons towards the LGBTIQ community. Also criticised were conservative members of the LGBTIQ community who opposed it even though it meant they could not marry often arguing with members of their own community.

Online homophobia was abundant during this debate, with claims made that it damaged people's mental health and caused LGBTIQ people to suicide. A formal definition of homophobia was reported by Wright Jr, Adams and Bernat (1999, p. 337) as being created by Weinberg in 1972 as being (Weinberg, 1972):

Homophobia, a term coined by Weinberg (1972), was originally defined as the dread of being in close quarters with homosexual men and women as well as irrational fear, hatred and intolerance by heterosexual individuals of homosexual men and women.

Weinberg claimed that it was a form of prejudice directed by one group at another (Herek, 2004; Weinberg, 1972). This is still an accurate view although the acceptance of LGBTIQ people is in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century varying in more positive degrees worldwide. In terms of Facebook posts, using homophobic terms in form of slang or labels (especially the term 'faggot') is applied generically in these posts. As this example shows, the degrees of homophobic comments vary but are nonetheless unpleasant.

In Figure 83, a journalist at Brisbane Australia's Courier Mail, Paul Hegerty, posts an opinion stating religious people are imposing their viewpoints on others by opposing marriage equality. Stating religious people are a minority is to some inflammatory, but to also state Jesus Christ would want marriage equality could be offensive and possibly considered blasphemous. However, even to Christians these are subjective, but the title of the post and the writer's views bait people to participate in arguing over homosexuality and marriage equality. From this develops not debate about the proposed Marriage Act change but arguments, some of which can be interpreted as homophobic:



**Courier Mail** ✓

3 August 2017 · ⚙️



When people oppose marriage equality on so-called Christian grounds they are not protecting religious freedom. They are only trying to impose a minority viewpoint on the Australian population, writes Paul Hegerty.



COURIERMAIL.COM.AU

**Jesus would want marriage equality**

OPINION

👍👎😬 140

410 comments 12 shares

Its a hetrosexual union of man n woman.Its not for Adam n Steve.

Like · Reply · 2y

Why not?

Like · Reply · 2y

how can the marriage of two people you don't know and will likely never meet affect your life in any way?

Like · Reply · 2y

So you're attempting to rewrite history? Omfg 😞

Like · Reply · 2y

the ONLY english speaking country that hasnt ruled out this discrimination is Australia. Also perhaps you missed the part where Eve was Adams 2nd wife so that whole divorce rule is gone and it is a woman's place to obey all men.

Like · Reply · 2y

My only question is, because frankly the rest is nonsense, is this. What effect does gay marriage have on you personally? I'll answer it for you, absolutely none. Not one bit. Do you know why? You're not gay.

Like · Reply · 2y



I'll answer your question because you're answering for me was greatly inaccurate and somewhat arrogant! Also calling the rest nonsense just shows you have no rational response.

It affects society as a whole, of which I am a part, to not acknowledge this is blind ignorance. This has been proven simply by watching America where:

1. The changes have resulted in compromised safety for women in changing rooms and toilets.
2. Businesses have been targeted, sued and shut down for not complying with gay couples demands.
3. Attempts to force Churches to comply with the demands of gay couples.
4. As also seen in Australia children become a greater target for sexual manipulation through schools and so called "sexual education" programs.

Sorry, only have time for the short version. Plus, it's my right to hold whatever opinion I choose.

Like · Reply · 2y



Thank you im one of 1000s who have signed it to have my vote counted.

Like · Reply · 2y



Why cant they get their own Act of Parliament called Pairage?

Like · Reply · 2y



That's a really good question  
It's not about equal rights, it's about forcing an agenda on other people.

Like · Reply · 2y



why can't we go back to the way the law was before John Howard changed it in 2004? (without a plebiscite) or why can't religious people have "holy Matrimony" and leave the legal contract of marriage for the rest of us.

Like · Reply · 2y

Howard changed it to protect it from militant gays n lesbians thats why we wont go back.Its for hetro couples n not them.They csn however have the Pairage Act.

Like · Reply · 2y · Edited



Figure 83. Australian Marriage Equality Facebook post (Hegerty, 2017)



**Example 2:****Anti-Vaxxers and a Football Player's Refusal to Vaccinate**

In 2020 during the period of the Coronavirus, the Australian football code Rugby League became embroiled in a conflict with some of its football players who refused to have an influenza vaccination. In particular, one player of the Gold Coast team, the Titans, refused to have a vaccination. His wife was alleged to also be against vaccinations, although she did deny this on social media. This caused a debate between those who argued that it was the individual's choice with their body to vaccinate or not against those opposed to people who refused vaccinations. It does not mean that every user who argued was an anti-vaxxer, but the debates about this issue demonised anti-vaxxer groups and individuals<sup>7</sup>.

Anti vaccination groups have been controversial and have attempted to be outlawed worldwide. The Internet, especially Facebook, has played a large part in the spread of misinformation, worry and moral panic about the consequences of vaccinations. This has often been at the expense of factual information. The medical community have acknowledged though that people may have physical reactions to vaccinations.

Anti-vaccinators oppose all forms of childhood vaccinations and believe that vaccinations are toxic, causing a variety of illnesses and adverse reactions including autism (Smith & Graham, 2017, p. 1310). The mass and social media also play a role in spreading anti-vaxxing information (Kata, 2010, p. 1709; Streefland, 2001; Streefland, Chowdhury & Ramos-Jimenez, 1999):

The media plays a large role in disseminating and sensationalizing vaccine objections. Such objections are part of what has been called the “anti-vaccination movement”, which has had a demonstrable impact on vaccination policies, and individual and community health. A common sequence to vaccination scares involves scientific debate about potential vaccine risks, which communication technology transmits via a rhetoric of doubt; parents incorporate this with personal experiences and spread their views to their social groups.

The users' goal of these anti-vaccination Facebook posts is to persuade another to accept their point of view as right. As in Example 1 where one user states it is their right to have an opinion, this is also a belief held by most users when debating vaccinations. The reason why this is a negative experience for users is varied but includes: people do not like their posts and themselves being personally attacked, they think they are right on either side and try to convince others to change their view, others like to participate in such debates for their enjoyment or some like to make light of this issue with making jokes about it.

In Figure 84, Peter Gleeson posts to the Courier Mail's Facebook page a criticism of parents who will not immunise their children. He uses the example of Gold Coast Titan's football player Bryce Cartwright who refused to have an influenza prevention vaccination. The Australian National Rugby League (NRL) made it compulsory for players to have a vaccination, which became the 'No Jab, No Play' policy. The example posts show how argueing occurs and instead of debating the issue, it becomes users trying to convince others they are right about an issue and will often name call and denigrate those that disagree with them:



**Courier Mail** ✓

17 May at 09:30 · ⚙️



It beggars belief that some parents would not immunise their children against life-threatening infections, even though we have the medicine to do so, writes Peter Gleeson.



COURIERMAIL.COM.AU

### Anti-vax poster boy most definitely not a team player

BRYCE Cartwright is now officially a poster boy for the anti-vax...

👍👎😂 236

973 comments 45 shares

Why is everyone so worried about not getting the flu vax. If they have their vax arent they suppose to protect you? It's his body his choice isnt it? Or is that only when it comes to aborting babies whom dont have a choice.

Like · Reply · 2d

👍❤️ 71

what's amazing is the creation of extreme fear around those not flu vaxxed, fear and pressure which didn't exist 5-10 years ago even though the vax was offered. Why is the Australian government so forceful in pushing the flu vax onto everyone all of a sudden and making it seem like you're the devil if you question or refuse it? The profit they will make and the pressure of big pharma and larger groups and people out their with more control than we know.

Like · Reply · 2d

👍❤️ 21

not just that whistle blowers now admitting there is depopulation agenda in the latets round of vaccines. STuff which will make you infertile and also change the way your body reacts for good. Sinister agenda by those who manufacture it, if only people would research speeches and agenda of bill gates and the sacklers the 2 biggest drug pushed in the world you would see the agend ain these vaccines

Like · Reply · 2d

👍❤️ 9

Wow, the person who wrote this article has obviously done zero research on the effectiveness or safety of the flu vaccine, here's a tip for you mr author, have a look at Therapeutic Goods Administration website and look into the studies that have been conducted on the safety of the flu vaccine (I'll let you in on a secret, there are none), and then have a look at the known adverse reactions (another spoiler there's lots). Now while you're at it you can also do some research on PubMed and look at papers that have found that getting the flu shot actually increases your chance of getting a corona virus or makes you more susceptible to other pneumonia diseases so in fact the only person who has an actual brain and is being a team player is the person who you are attempting to vilify.

Like · Reply · 2d · Edited



This guys is a f,,,wit, and they are letting him get away with it..... shame on the powers that be shame

Like · Reply · 2d

That's an understandment if ever there was one..

Like · Reply · 3d

Labelling someone anti Vax for not having flu shots is like labelling all non-smokers as anti-tobacco. What an abomination of journalism this is. Total disgrace. Courier Mail is anti-choice

Why is everyone so worried about not getting the flu vax. If they have their vax arent they suppose to protect you? It's his body his choice isnt it? Or is that only when it comes to aborting babies whom dont have a choice.

Like · Reply · 2d



what's amazing is the creation of extreme fear around those not flu vaxxed, fear and pressure which didn't exist 5-10 years ago even though the vax was offered. Why is the Australian government so forceful in pushing the flu vax onto everyone all of a sudden and making it seem like you're the devil if you question or refuse it? The profit they will make and the pressure of big pharma and larger groups and people out their with more control than we know.

Like · Reply · 2d



not just that whistle blowers now admitting there is depopulation agenda in the latets round of vaccines. STuff which will make you infertile and also change the way your body reacts for good. Sinister agenda by those who manufacture it, if only people would research speeches and agenda of bill gates and the sacklers the 2 biggest drug pushed in the world you would see the agend ain these vaccines

Like · Reply · 2d



Figure 84. Anti-Vaccination Debate Facebook Thread (Courier Mail, 2020)

**Example 3:****Racism and Hate Speech in Changing the Date of Australia Day**

Facebook goes to great lengths to prevent hate speech being posted. Discrimination, racism and stereotyping content are often not removed from posts. Two groups frequently targeted are immigrants as immigration is a controversial issue worldwide, and indigenous groups, especially African-Americans in the United States and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Australia. Additionally, Muslim people are often blamed for terrorist activity, while Indians and other Asians are stereotyped with comments such as ‘they are taking over our country’.

Multiculturalism, described as characterising ethnic and racial<sup>8</sup> features of groups (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2010), is especially targeted and blamed when people’s races are mentioned on Facebook. For example, in Australia African youth gang violence, committed by those who have moved to Australia, is frequently met with the comment ‘they don’t want to integrate’. Another target, long vilified with anti-Semitism over history, are Jewish people with the stereotypical comments being about money and the conflict they have with Palestine.

Defining racism, as pertaining to it being used in Facebook posts, is (Priest et al., 2011, p. 546; Berman & Paradies, 2008):

Racism is conceptualised as comprising avoidable and unfair phenomena that lead to inequalities in power, resources and opportunities across racial or ethnic groups. It can be expressed through beliefs and stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination, and occurs at many social levels, including interpersonally and systemically, and as internalised racism.

Racism on Facebook takes two forms. The first are the general comments posted in threads or on user’s personal accounts admonishing and demonising races, whilst the second are Facebook groups and pages where people openly share their prejudices. Not every person who posts is necessarily a racist, but perpetuation of stereotypes in words and images often appear in posts. A common saying used in the posts is ‘I’m not a racist but’. Facebook users may argue with those making perceived racist comments calling them racists. Fake Facebook groups are often set up to encourage and spread racist ideology. For example, Farkas, Schou and Neumayer (2018) found fake Muslim Facebook pages sustained ongoing racism, while Ekman (2019) claimed various Facebook groups were created as weapons to use against many races.

Politicians especially use Facebook and other social media to espouse blame on others that can be perceived as racism. One issue that inflames racial tension in Australia is the suggestion that the 26<sup>th</sup> of January is not Australia Day but Invasion or Survival Day. This is because the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788 in Australia is considered a form of ‘white righteousness’ as the Aboriginals had been on the land before the arrival of Captain Arthur Phillip (Wyld, 2019; Thala Beach, 2018). Protests to change the date occur before and on the 26<sup>th</sup> of January. Conservative politician, listed as a former senator who was known to have extremist views on race and immigration, continued to post once he left politics. On his Facebook page in 2020 he posted a link to a blog that resulted in Facebook users posting support for the views and racist content:

 **Fraser Anning - Former Senator**  
27 January · 🌐

What actually happened today at the Brisbane Invasion day rally?  
#invasionday #Aboriginal #ChangeTheDate  
<https://richardsonpost.com/.../aboriginal-invasion-day-prote.../>



RICHARDSONPOST.COM

**Aboriginal invasion day protests, what actually happened?**  
Today's "Invasion Day" protests in Brisbane were attended by our roving...

   575 556 comments 79 shares

 Like  Comment  Share

Most relevant ▾

Gravy boat day for them. Australia Day for the rest.

Like · Reply · 16w



By their own reckoning, most of them should hate at least one of their parents - the white ones 😞

Like · Reply · 16w



that's what I don't understand. I'd be surprised if any of their parents have a full blood parent.

Like · Reply · 16w



Got me stumped too. - professional antagonism at work 😊

Like · Reply · 16w



get up of your butts do some work look after your family and you will be happy.....maybe you are just wingers....

Like · Reply · 16w



Who's paying for this "Rent-a-Crowd"?

Like · Reply · 16w



So it's ok for them to have that but when a white person does it we are racist... 🙄



Like · Reply · 16w



Wonder how many receive Centrelink money, nothing wrong when it's pay day

Like · Reply · 16w



correct, straight down to buy some cheap plonk- repeat.

Like · Reply · 16w

yep hand out day

Like · Reply · 16w

Write a reply...



Top fan



Like · Reply · 16w



Figure 85. Former politician page discussing Australia Day as Invasion Day (Fraser Anning Former Senator, 2020)

**Example 4:****Criticism of an Actress by a Facebook Group over Abortion Opinion**

Abortion is a medical procedure involving the removal of pregnancy tissue, products of conception or the fetus and placenta (afterbirth) from the uterus (Harvard Health Publishing, 2019). It is an emotive issue that has strong pro and against sides, although some may believe if the person is in medically in danger or has experienced rape or the child may be born with severe disabilities, then abortion is justified. Much stigma is placed on women that have had or are contemplate having an abortion with many parts of society attempting to pressure women to carry the child to full term (Kumar, Hessini & Mitchell, 2008). Many religions are opposed to abortion, with such arguments often cited on Facebook. The core argument is, is the fetus a person from the moment of conception, if so is this a form of killing and in having an abortion is the person denied the chance of having a life on earth? (Marquis, 1989; Tooley, 1972; Thomson, 1971).

In 2020 American actress, producer and singer Alyssa Milano commented on abortion to which a Facebook group called Feminism is Evil posted criticisms of her, as well as opposing abortion:



**Feminism is Evil**  
17 May at 09:03 · 🌐

More word-magic from the Cultural Marxists.



LIFENEWS.COM  
**Alyssa Milano Says an Unborn Baby's Heartbeat Should be Called "Fetal Pole Cardiac Activity"**

she aborted two babies to live her selfish dream of being a star. According to their worship of themselves a woman can't possibly do both.

Like · Reply · 4d



...nothing inspiring or empowering in her and their message. Her label as an actress gives her some power to spread these lies

Like · Reply · 3d



most people only know her for TWO TV shows: Who's the Boss and Charmed.

Like · Reply · 18h

she wishes she was a B actress. she's strictly D list.

Like · Reply · 15h



So...

1) Fetal, being of fetus=  
Unborn baby

2) Cardiac= heart

3) activity (only activity of the heart is a beat)=beat

\*She wants it called a Baby's heartbeat.

\*\*Ok Ms Alyssa...we'll call it what it is, a baby's heartbeat...since you insist. 🙄

Like · Reply · 4d



Your heartbeat should be called ....non-existent

Like · Reply · 1d



This person has been abused so much, she hates. I pray she changes by our prayers. I want to see her do a complete turn around praising Jesus the same as she is doing now for the devil

Like · Reply · 3d



Why does she get this attention? She is not even a good actress.. This kind of thing is the only way she stays in the public eye. Stop feeding her

Like · Reply · 4d





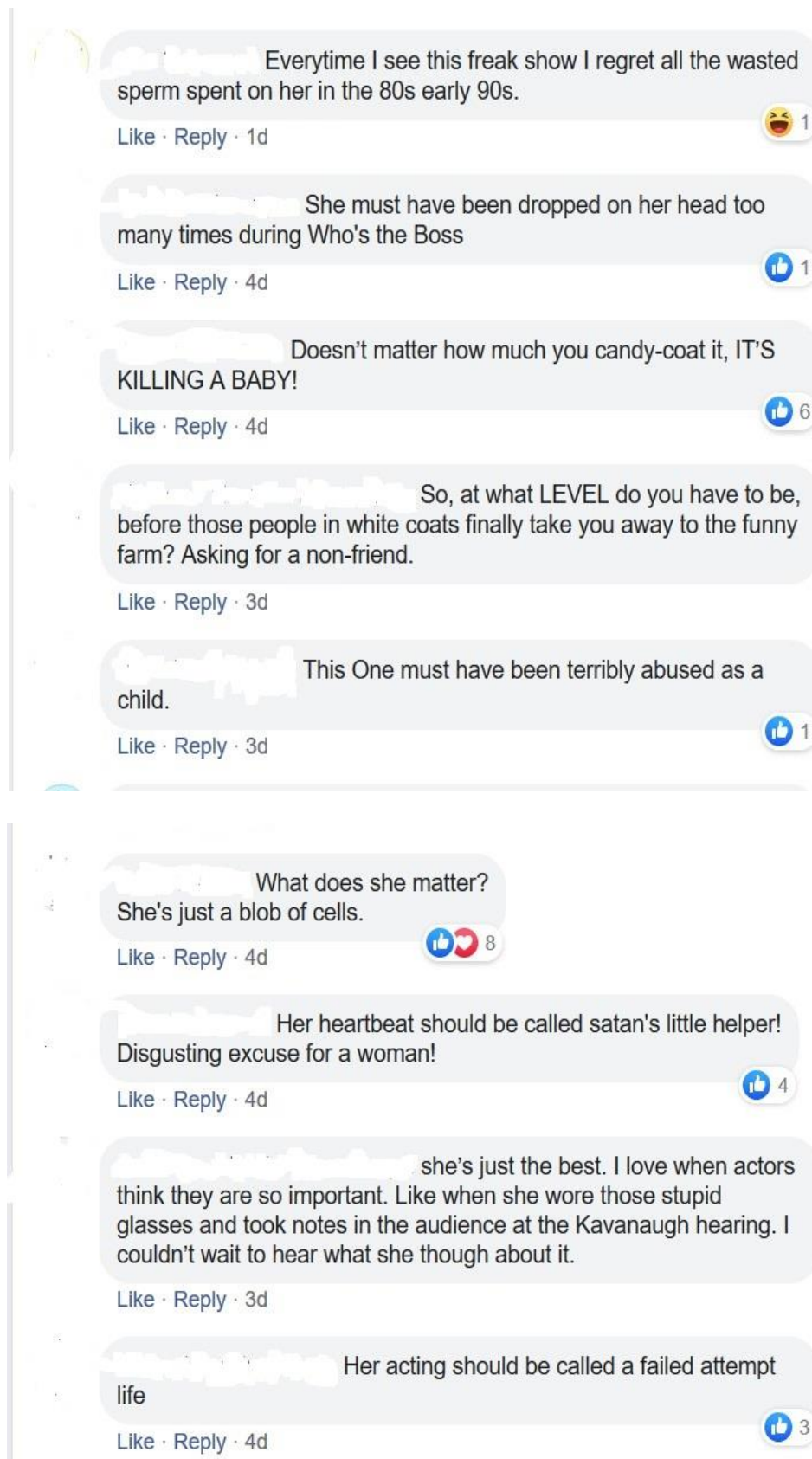


Figure 86. Facebook Group posts criticising actress and abortion (Feminism is Evil, 2020)

**Example 5:****Left and Right Wing Political Arguments**

In many countries politics is labelled in several ways with three main terms used on a spectrum: left, right and centre, although variants like centre left or centre right exist. It is difficult to thoroughly define left and right as some political parties have policies that can be considered the same types. Generally, right wing politics is associated with authority and control, at an extreme it is a form of fascism with the Germany Nazi Party as an example. By contrast, left wing politics advocates many forms of freedoms and liberal policies on topics such as public funding of education and health, welfare, support for LGBTIQ people and importantly the separation of church and state. Communism is seen as an extreme form of left wing politics (Bedi, 2019). Both left and right governments also may not respect human rights and freedoms.

The issue with the use of left and right arguments on Facebook is they are used often without an understanding of what each means. They are scattered around posts, used to label other Facebook users who may actually not believe in the political ideologies they are accused of supporting. People fiercely argue on Facebook, seen when the government makes policy decisions or election campaigns are underway. A common term used with contempt by users is 'leftie' meaning left wing. It is associated with topics such as climate change and binary gender choice. In the United States, the Democratic Party is treated similar by many by the use of the word 'liberal'. Political posts have the effect of causing negative reactions as Figure 87 demonstrates where the writer states Australia should no longer trust the United States:

**bt** Brisbane Times ✓  
11 May at 15:05 · 🌐

#Opinion For 20 years, Australia had existed comfortably in a fog of delusion. Successive governments and most Australians convinced themselves that the emerging world order was one in which they could do pretty well.



BRISBANETIMES.COM.AU

**Crisis shows how little we have in common with the US**

Can Australia afford to continue to place so much trust and reliance on...

👍 😂 ❤️ 124

86 comments 23 shares

Good god BT you employ some truly stupid "journalists" and opinion piece writers ffs 🙄🙄🙄

Like · Reply · 1w



The article is spot on. I'm from the USA and for the first time in my life I'm wondering if America will survive as a nation. The Orange Ape Trump is doing his best to ensure that it doesn't.

Like · Reply · 1w



is an Alt Right chimp. Ignore it.

Like · Reply · 1w



and is a pedo left wing basement dweller

Like · Reply · 1w



You chimps are hilariously stupid. You're nothing but a dumbfuck coward hiding behind your fake profile.

I guarantee you wouldn't be walking away if you tried talking to me like that in person.

Like · Reply · 1w



Shame you need to abuse others to make yourself feel good.

Like · Reply · 1w



Be careful who you trust! America has shown itself to be ignorant about world politics, health issues, their President is an ignorant bully! Their gun ownership issue is so dangerous, they don't have the guts to control ownership of powerful weapons, redneck idiotsthi k they have to strut aroundshowing off their "toys",grow up!

Like · Reply · 1w



ah cool, someone displaying their ignorance of guns and what they are.

Like · Reply · 1w

Yeah ... Lets suck up to China !

Like · Reply · 1w

Write a reply...



USA is a total basket case.

Like · Reply · 1w



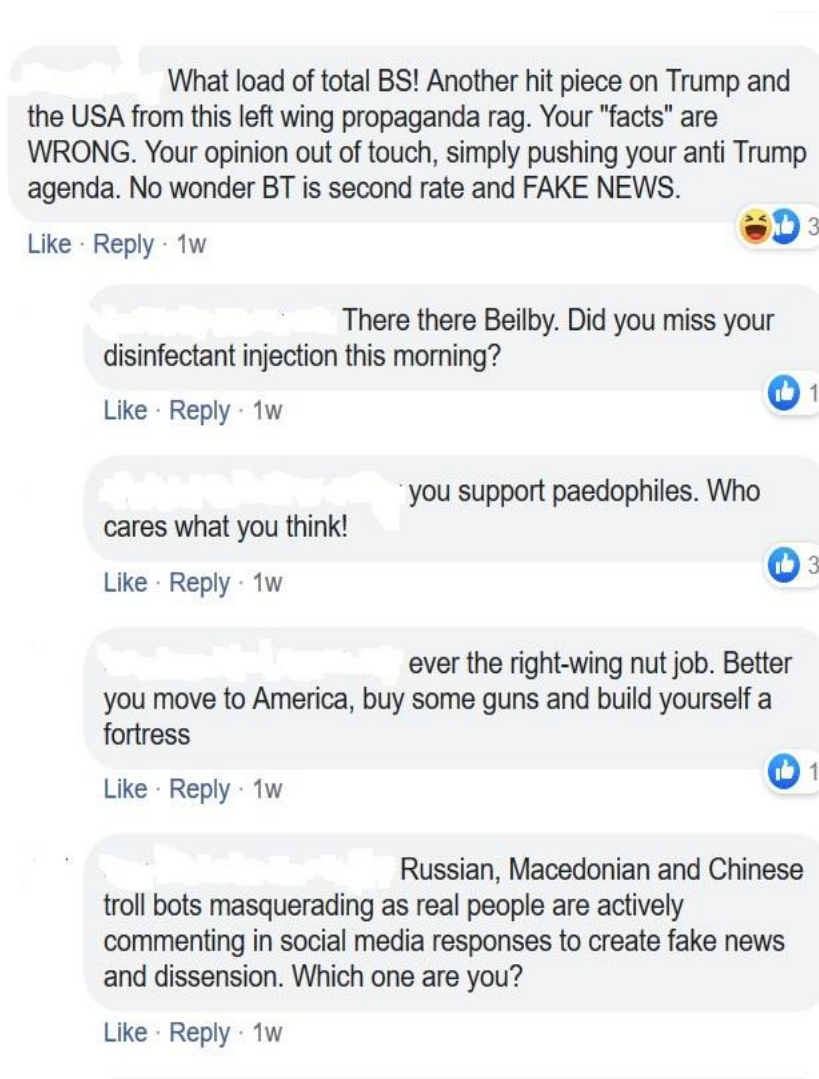


Figure 87. Facebook political debate turns to argueing (Brisbane Times, 2020)

This section highlighted the negative nature of many posts that challenge the user's experience of interacting with Facebook. As a sample, these five topics display Suler's (2004) Online Disinhibition Effect. Not being physical present saying the unpleasant comments to others is the general behavioural discourse that appears in posts. The difficulty for users is that what is hate speech is clearly stated in Facebook's guidelines, but due to the high global user numbers, much of these types of comments are not removed. It can be seen in Figure 87 that argueing and disruption occurred when one user called another a 'paedophile', but this is not necessary considered hate speech by Facebook. Nonetheless, it is unpleasant for others to read such arguements and can cause people to leave facebook.

Facebook trolling and argueing is an example of the negativity that does question the notion of free speech on social media. Civility, Netiquette and manners can disappear under the temptation to hit back at people by argueing and name-calling. People are passionate about issues and Facebook provides a forum for often powerless people in society to use. While it is not expected to be a perfect place to rationally debate issues, the concerns about it being a cacophony of noise has been raised by researchers and the media. This negativity is concerning because people habitually use Facebook and create a view of the world from it.

## Facebook Addiction as a Long Emerging Mental Health Issue

Constant and frequent use of Facebook to check content can become a form of addiction. While new social media platforms have been invented that can be also linked to addiction, Facebook has come under criticism for creating an addictive platform to use. It becomes an addiction, however, under diagnosis from a mental health professional. This section will discuss why it is a negative use of Facebook including using research studies that have lent credibility to this being a real issue for the platform's users.

### Definition of Addiction

Addiction is associated with negative human behaviours such as cigarette smoking, gambling, shopping, risky sports, physical and other occupation work (being a workaholic), alcohol, eating, recreational drugs, sexual activities and many others. Like many definitions in academia, there is commonality and difference in defining it but words such as habit, devotion and compulsion are used. For the context of this section, a definition of addiction is taken from an American mental health resource website Mental Health.net (2020):

Addiction is the repeated involvement with a substance or activity, despite the substantial harm it now causes, because that involvement was (and may continue to be) pleasurable and/or valuable.

There are many consequences for addiction as it is classified as a disease. Symptom examples can be (Medical News Today, 2020):

#### Psychological

- An inability to stop using or doing activity
- Still using a substance even with poor health
- Risk taking and obsessions with obtaining needed thing

#### Social

- People will give up or sacrifice hobbies, friendships or exercise
- People have stashes of alcohol or drugs, or in the case of the Internet excess use charges
- Financial issues

#### Physical

- Withdrawal symptoms affecting everyday functioning
- Insomnia
- Physical appearance may change

### Internet Addiction

Internet addiction was initially considered not a valid addiction problem. Griffiths (2000, p. 211) states that technological addictions are operationally defined as nonchemical (behavioural) addictions that involve human-machine interaction. Pies (2009) states an alternative label for this issue as pathological use of electronic media (PUEM). As at 2020,

Internet addiction is still not recognised as a valid mental health issue or included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)<sup>9</sup>, although that may change as research grows in this area (Hartney, 2000; Cash, Rae, Steel & Winkler, 2012).

It was the work of researcher Kimberly Young in the United States that changed the view that it was a clinical disorder. She presented her findings of a 1996 study suggesting evidence for Internet addiction as a clinical condition to the American Psychological Association. This was greeted by the Association with controversy and scepticism, yet two decades later it became an evolving area of research which provided guidance to psychologists about risk factors and treatment protocols (TEDx Talks, 2015). Young then went on to establish a Net Addiction Centre.

Her finding was that it was not the Internet as a space and place that was addictive, but the specific applications (software and platforms) that drive the need to constantly interact in an addictive pattern with them (Young, 1998). This would justify stating that Facebook can be a negative addiction as other sites or software, such as chat rooms or phone apps, are where the addictive behaviours occur. Later research would support such a claim that it is a site, not the Internet itself, that is addictive as a person is drawn to a particular part of the Internet, not to the whole system. Young (1998, p. 243) suggested in her study a possible reason for this, namely the need to connect and form relationships that may not be happening in the person's real life:

The reasons underlying such an impulse control disability should be further examined. One interesting issue raised in this study is that, in general, the Internet itself is not addictive. Specific applications appeared to play a significant role in the development of pathological Internet use as dependents were less likely to control their use of highly interactive features than other on-line applications. This paper suggests that there exists an increased risk in the development of addictive use the more interactive the application utilized by the on-line user. It is possible that a unique reinforcement of virtual contact with on-line relationships may fulfill unmet real life social needs. Individuals who feel misunderstood and lonely may use virtual relationships to seek out feelings of comfort and community.

Studies were performed before Young's paper was released but some issues were arising that continue to arise in this field. The association of the Internet with youth more so than users over 35 years of age is still a cultural assumption that is made. Older people are increased users of the Internet, often not by choice. Researchers conducting these studies usually draw on university students for data, often by surveys. Selecting various student populations to find out about Internet addiction is only problematic in that higher responses reporting such addiction is likely higher in younger and student populations (Byun, et al., 2009). However, later studies did use the general public as a sample group. Griffiths (2000) by contrast conducted a study where the use of interviews to build a narrative of why people are Internet addicted. Regardless of its current status as a valid mental health problem, much evidence exists that it is a major human problem and treatments have been developed to help those with it.

## Facebook Addiction

Facebook addiction has received wide coverage in the mass media with commentators reporting it as a real human health issue. The overuse of Facebook by checking it many times a day or constant posting are among those behaviours recognised as having a negative mental health impact on a person. Memes and images have been created that compare Facebook addiction to other addictions, as Figures 88, showing Facebook as a medication, and 89 showing Facebook as being like a packet of cigarettes, illustrating how people may view this addiction:



*Figure 88.* Facebook addiction represented as medication (Pixabay, n.d.)



*Figure 89.* Facebook compared to smoking cigarettes (Castellano, 2017)

Diagnosing if someone has Facebook addiction can be challenging for the psychologist or other mental health professional. A widely used Facebook addiction scale was developed by Andreassen, Torsheim, Brunborg and Pallesen (2012), drawing on The Bergen Facebook



Addiction Scale that had already been developed. Asking the person to rate their responses according to a scale can maximise diagnosing Facebook addiction.

As an overview of understanding Facebook addiction, there has been a profile of the types of personality and other traits separating the addicted and not addicted. In particular, it is theorised that someone's self-esteem has much effect on becoming Facebook addicted. This does not suggest people with high esteem may not be consistently and daily using Facebook, but certain behaviours can suggest an addiction problem. Self-esteem issues are only one factor that explains Facebook addiction. There have been explanations for non-addicted and addicted Facebook users described as:

Non-Addicted Facebook user (Biachnio, Przepiorka & Pantic, 2016, p. 703):

Ordinary Facebook users use Facebook in a normal, healthy way. They do not have problems with quitting Facebook use and are not too much involved in it. They have high levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction, which may serve as a buffer against developing an addiction. This group of people use Facebook as a tool.

Addicted Facebook user (Hu, Kim, Siwek & Wilder, 2017, p. 2)<sup>10</sup>:

Moreover, individuals with low self-esteem are more likely to actively engage in social compensatory friending (Lee et al., 2012) and feel safer disclosing themselves on Facebook, even though no direct social benefits are reaped (e.g., being more liked by their Facebook friends) (Forest & Wood, 2012).

People have come to rely on the Internet for providing companionship. Rheingold's (1993) stated the socially anxious and introverted used virtual communities and chat rooms to share opinions they felt they could not do offline. The link to addiction is when it becomes a need to do constantly this and replaces offline interactions. The addicted Facebook user may appear to others offline who know them as 'normal' or not exhibiting addictive behaviour. Yet based on the large interest in finding out what causes Facebook addiction, and proving it is something that is measured and quantifiable, the actual reasons are complex. Ryan (2015) concludes that there may be any type of underlying psychopathology driving the need to constantly be using Facebook and that perhaps such addictions to it may actually be temporary, unlike alcohol or cigarette use may be.

Young (2019) draws on many years of research to show why Facebook addiction is a negative use of it and how may it be damaging to the person's mental health. She describes five situations that suggest the presence of this addiction:

1. Spending time thinking about Facebook and how you will use it, with a preoccupation to immediately share information. Those who suffer from an addiction do not always judge what is appropriate or inappropriate to post due to their preoccupation with checking and responding, which leads to a constant engagement in the activity.
2. The urge to use the platform grows with constant checking behaviours of the newsfeed or responses to your posts.

3. Using Facebook to forget about personal problems and daily life routines, boredom and worry reduction. When using Facebook as an addiction, the user is distracted in whatever they are doing and finds it hard to be fully present at the moment. The use of Facebook then becomes a distraction from problems because one's attention is always diverted with its use.
4. Becoming restless when being stopped from using Facebook, especially temporary bans from the platform, almost like a narcotic withdrawal.
5. Using Facebook so much that it has had a negative impact on relationships and work performance. As you get used to communicating on Facebook via messaging, sharing photos and posts, commenting and 'liking' others, it may come to a point when you get more comfortable socializing online than offline. You become over-reliant on Facebook to fulfill your social needs and may start sacrificing the time spent on real-life meet-ups. The behavior becomes unhealthy such that you become uncomfortable or fearful with face-to-face communication.

These are a guide, but they do align themselves with the types of symptoms and behaviours that are part of addiction.

Findings from predominantly statistical studies offer recommendations for diagnosing and managing Facebook addiction. Turel (2015, p. 89) states Facebook addiction can become a vicious cycle, suggesting prevention can be achieved by enforcing constraints on using it, or helping users develop self-awareness regarding their potentially problematic behaviour. Many other addiction treatments may be employed depending on the skills of the psychologist or mental health professional and the desires of the person to stop experiencing Facebook addiction.

If this behaviour is considered a negative use of Facebook, looking at the large body of studies helps to understand why. To illustrate, eight studies are displayed in Table 9. All these are statistical-based studies. This table shows the names of the researchers, year of publication and the conclusions gained from the study. For this book the use of these studies is only to illustrate the types of results of Facebook addiction research that has emerged over time as Table 9 shows:

Table 9  
*Eight examples of Facebook addiction studies*

<b>Researcher/s and Study Year</b>	<b>Findings and/or Conclusions of Facebook Addiction</b>
Mahmood & Farooq (2014)	Correlation found in sample group that those measured as emotional unstable were more likely to become addicted to Facebook
Orosz, Tóth-Király & Bóthe (2016)	Persistence in using Facebook is linked to obsessive passion for using it as it forms a strong attachment to using the platform that can lead to addiction
Ryan, Reece, Chester & Xenos (2016)	Facebook use can provide a level of social interaction that a person does not have in their offline lives, hence addiction

	may occur
Tang, Chen, Yang, Chung & Lee (2016)	Online interpersonal relationships were the dominant predictor of Facebook addiction; that is, the need to constantly be in contact with Facebook friends daily encourages addiction
Hwang (2017)	Those who are strongly extroverted and weakly conscientious were found to be more addictive on Facebook
Biolcati, Mancini, Pupi & Mugheddu (2018)	A person with neurotic personalities, such as social anxiety, are likely to develop Facebook addiction as they prefer less offline interactions and more online ones that Facebook offers
Pornsakulvanich (2018)	The more time a person spent on Facebook, the higher the likelihood that person would be addicted to Facebook
Juergensen & Leckfor (2019)	Individuals who reported greater Facebook addiction tendencies implicitly approached Facebook images faster than those with lower Facebook addiction tendencies

These studies show how Facebook addiction, like most addiction, is unique to the individual. As an example, a person may obsessively check posts but this does not indicate actual addiction. Frequency of use has been a criteria for diagnosing it and it is plausible in most cases this is a reason for the addiction, although not all researchers agree on this (Marino, Gini, Vieno & Spada, 2018; Pontes, Kuss & Griffiths, 2015; Hormes, Kearns & Timko, 2014; Kittinger, Correia & Irons, 2012).

Behaviours such as, even with Facebook's restrictions, sending friend requests to friends of the user's Facebook friends may also not be an addictive behaviour. Griffiths (2013) especially argues that not every use of Facebook constitutes an addiction and that measurement scales should take into account differing uses. Someone who is constantly messaging people may not be addicted but someone who is checking for likes many times a day may, in Griffith's view, fit the criteria of being a Facebook addict. This is why this area of research needs further work to validate it as a credible addiction condition.

Not all claims that Facebook addiction is real have come from research. From within social media companies, including Facebook, former employees have stated their views on why Facebook addiction exists. Sean Parker, former president of Facebook, in 2017 stated about the platform "It's a social-validation feedback loop ... exactly the kind of thing that a hacker like myself would come up with, because you're exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology," (Allen, 2017). The need for validation from others is a strong human trait, even though people can claim they do not worry about what others think. Therefore, there may be validity in Parker's statement.

Another vocal critic of Facebook in this area has come from computer scientist and a founder of virtual reality Jaron Lanier. His first hand knowledge by being in the industry lends some credibility to the possibilities Facebook, and other social media platforms, are harmful to

humans. In his book *Ten Arguments for Deleting your Social Media Accounts Right Now* (Lanier, 2018) he uses emotive terminology such as social media is a cage that goes everywhere with the user. Dramatic claims are constantly made against Facebook especially that it is like using recreational drugs such as cocaine and that it gives a dopamine hit in the brain.

Lanier makes an observation about Facebook and other social media that paints these platforms as causing much harm to society. In an interview between Paul Solman and Lanier, Lanier states (Solman, 2018):

PAUL SOLMAN: So I just actually activated a Facebook account within the last month. Are you suggesting I get rid of it already?

JARON LANIER: If our species is going to survive, it's going to be because we learn how to have sane conversations with one another. And the way social media is today does not allow that. And it's, I believe, destroying our future. Not everyone can afford to delete their accounts on social media because they might have a dependency of one sort or another. If you can delete, however, I think you have a duty to delete. Not only are you gradually nudging us all in the right direction, but in learning how to live your life without these accounts, you're also pioneering what it's like to live without them. And other people can learn from you. So it's really important that more and more people do it.

Facebook addiction has been illustrated as a negative use of the platform in this section. Although as at 2020 it still has much work and constant research to convince it to be formally recognised as a mental health issue, the individual needs to decide if they are spending too much time on Facebook. If any readers feel they are addicted the best course of action is to talk to your General Practitioner or doctor who can refer you to an addiction specialist.<sup>11</sup>

## **Facebook Live Video Controversies**

Chapter Two discussed how Facebook Live worked and why it was significant in Facebook's history. With Facebook's desire to have anyone use this part of the platform, no pre-checking of the possible content is done by Facebook moderators. Therefore, the possibility of sexual, violent or other inappropriate content may appear during streams. Although the user takes the risk and relies on the good faith of the person conducting the stream, if the live broadcast is a controversial issue the user has the choice not to participate. A problem for Facebook, and all social media with live streaming, is that some forms of censorship and surveillance may be needed to prevent inappropriate content from being viewed. This is difficult for Facebook to consistently monitor especially before live broadcasts begin.

The main negative use of Facebook Live is illustrated by Mengü and Mengü (2015, p. 225) who state how the power of using social media for spreading hate is a major problem for global social media platforms:

Nevertheless, unconscious or uncontrolled use of the power of social media may lead to the spread of hate speech, infringement of personal rights, psychological attacks, symbolic violence, broadcasting private visions without the consent of the interested parties, deceiving people with fake accounts, spreading negative

discourses intending to abuse, in addition to mobbing, harassment and insult along with the circulation of malevolent views and information on the Internet.

Despite the hate speech community guidelines Facebook has, such content does often appear on the platform. The combination of real-time video and chat promotes high levels of engagement and constitutes a key characteristic of social live-streaming, hence a factor for its popularity (Rein & Venturini, 2018).

Web 2.0 websites, anonymous message boards like 4Chan, chat rooms, online video hosting and social media platforms are made for the discussion of, and spreading of, online hate. This includes homophobia, misogyny, racism and prejudice. Conway, Scrivens & Macnair (2019) documented the history of Right-Wing Extremists (RWE) long use of the Internet for such activities. They suggested that Facebook is the primary platform for spreading hate as it has a larger user base than Twitter or other platforms (Conway, Scrivens & Macnair, 2019). Although the Dark Web may house much racist and hateful material and allows interactions to occur, Facebook still allows questionable content of this type to be hosted on its platform. Facebook Live can be used for meetings between people to spread such hatred, which again questions how can this be prevented without imposing strict censorship on users?

Sheffield (2018) lists many positive and negative events that have appeared on Facebook Live since 2016 that have become an archive for documenting violence, racism, protest and authorities, such as police officers, using brutality against citizens. This brings into question that, although still a negative use of Facebook, such videos can be archived and used for several purposes, including being used as evidence in court cases. An early example of this was the July 2016 shooting by police in the United States of Philando Castile where his partner recorded her interactions with the police. It was an early example of Facebook Live as it had just launched in that month and year (Sheffield, 2018).

An extreme case was the Christchurch New Zealand shootings on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2019. Brenton Tarrant had on a helmet a recording device and streamed his attack on Facebook Live. Although the stream feed was removed from Facebook, many photos from his Facebook Live stream exist. It is important to acknowledge this crime even though it is unpleasant, but only one disturbing but not explicit image will be shown from this case to illustrate what was seen by users on the Live stream.

During the attack the filming and streaming onto Facebook Live occurred. The use of the camera on top of his helmet gave a first-person view of his activities. Figure 90 shows an example of an image that was streamed:



*Figure 90.* View from shooter's camera (Zauva, 2019)

Bell (2019) reported the event as:

Facebook also said in a statement it had removed the footage and was also pulling down “praise or support” posts for the shootings. It also said it alerts authorities to threats of violence or violence as soon as it becomes aware through reports or Facebook tools. The gunman who opened fire inside at one of the New Zealand mosques appeared to live-stream his attack on Facebook in a video that looked to be recorded on a helmet camera.

It is reasonable to feel puzzlement or disgust that users watching this may like the stream by using the like emoticon and making comments that are supporting the gunman. Bell (2019) illustrates this in report that Facebook and Twitter were slow to remove the video of the attack:

Following the shootings, Mosharraf Zaidi, an ex-government adviser, columnist and seasoned policy analyst who works for the policy think tank Tabadlab, tweeted: “Unbelievable that both @facebook and @twitter have failed to remove (the) video of the terrorist attack in #Christchurch. Every single view of those videos is a potential contribution to future acts of violence. These platforms have a responsibility they are failing to live up to.”

This incident started a debate calling for Facebook to tightening controls over Facebook Live streams. This was so that right-wing extremists and terrorists could not use it to promote discriminatory goals and actions, or indoctrinate others into supporting such actions. But Facebook has also been criticised for having a questionable track record for removing and blocking extremist content (Thompson, 2019, p. 84).

There were responses made by various governments, in particular the Australian Government passing legislation that would make Facebook accountable and penalised if such streams occurred again. Because she was the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern was expected to take social and legislative decisions to manage this problem. Thompson (2019, p. 83) states the Christchurch Summit that occurred as being:

In May 2019, the Christchurch Call summit in Paris brought together the European Commission, 17 governments and eight major digital media corporations to discuss ways to combat the proliferation of violent extremist content online. Initiated by New Zealand prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, and French president, Emmanuel Macron, the summit was impelled by the terrorist attacks on two mosques in Christchurch in March 2019.

But as Bell (2019) reports, there is a certain morbid curiosity that drives people to watch the attack, and other such material on Facebook Live and other social media:

Facebook Livestream, which the shooter appeared to use, is an “extremely difficult hole to plug,” said Amanullah. The problem with such content appearing on social media, he pointed out, is that it feeds the curiosity of online viewers. “People are curious and want to look at forbidden fruit; no matter the content,” said Amanullah. “Even people who are horrified are curious.”

Facebook Live is a medium where people feel they are participating in democratic processes. This streaming service on Facebook has so many benefits to share information and keep in contact with people that its removal from the platform is unlikely. To counter the actions of extremists, and those that stream other inappropriate material, the ability to quickly report it to Facebook to cease its transmission is vital. Yet the streaming of such material also should consider being kept as it may be vital in proving criminal activity as illustrated by the case in Chicago of a disabled person beaten by a gang that was used in the case against them (Cevallo, 2017).

A final comment from Crenshaw and Pehoski (2019, p. 2) reflects on this issue:

Facebook Live’s immediacy and speed, both in broadcasting a message and in others sharing it, has brought people together and has incited or revealed violence against others. Its availability to everyone -from ordinary citizens to politicians to mass murderers - shows a democratizing force inherent in the technology. But what is the price paid for putting this ability to quickly “go live” in the hands of so many communicators? What ethical problems arise when content can be shared and used in ways that the original poster did not imagine?

## **Other Types of Negative Facebook Use**

There are other issues which have concerned Facebook users, the general public, governments, the law and police. The four to be discussed are: Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), ghosting, human sleep and Facebook use and specific privacy risks to the individual. Why these are considered negative are because they have been reported as impacting on the physical and mental health of Facebook users.

### *Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)*

Virtual communities, chat rooms, social media and phone apps all function to create an online world where people can bond and share information, be supported and solve any type of problem. When this desire for connection becomes obsessive it can be problematic for the person. A negative use of Facebook has been the phenomena Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), which has become widely reported in the mass media and the subject of much academic research. Defining FOMO in three ways are as follows:

A pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent (Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan & Gladwell, 2013)

Fear-of-missing-out (FOMO) refers to feelings of anxiety that arise from the realization that you may be missing out on rewarding experiences that others are having. FOMO can be identified as an intra-personal trait that drives people to stay up to date of what other people are doing, among others on social media platforms (Franchina et al. 2018)

The fear of missing out refers to the feeling or perception that others are having more fun, living better lives, or experiencing better things than you are. It involves a deep sense of envy and affects self-esteem. It is often exacerbated by social media sites like Instagram and Facebook (Scott, 2020)

What is understood from these definitions is that negative feelings arise from viewing what we see as people having better lives than our own. The preoccupation with being around those and participating in their lives can be strong. A problem is that Facebook is a controlled environment where the person is capturing a moment in time in a post or photo. To assume the other person is happier than the person viewing it is often erroneous. Yet FOMO has become a widely recognised problem and may be a factor in becoming addicted to Facebook.

FOMO is not a new problem as the discussion of FOMO as a legitimate human problem has significantly increased with the rise of social media (Abel, Buff & Burr, 2016, p. 33). Research in this area is significant and has attempted to give mental health practitioners a set of guidelines to treat it. In one study, consistently found across other studies, FOMO was a predictor of social media and smartphone addiction (Franchina et al. 2018), hence why it is considered a mental health issue. In another study, the result was that people might not adequately focus on their own daily life experiences, which shape their sense of self, due to their inner desire to track others' daily experiences (Dogan, 2019, p. 11). A commentary by John Grohol (2018) summarises FOMO as a problem as this:

I believe, much to their detriment, that the makers of social networking technologies have some rough idea - but not in any nuanced or scientific way - how the tools and products they create are changing human behavior. It's an impulse control problem - we cannot easily control our impulse to "check" the technology to ensure something "more important" isn't waiting our immediate attention.

But the more you check Facebook, the happier Facebook is. It is actually a feature that its users are gripped by FOMO, because it drives more people to use Facebook more often. So they can show you more ads and make more money.



FOMO may seem an odd trait for a human to have. It could be asked why having this constant connection, which is essentially non-physical, is so important to many? Facebook is not totally responsible for the way people respond to what users post on the platform. However, there is credibility in the studies to suggest people have become attached to thinking there is an idealised version of others that makes a person feel bad towards the way their life is. The phenomenon FOMO does constitute a negative use of Facebook that people need to be aware of with the cliché ‘looks are deceiving’ being an accurate description of this issue.

### ***Ghosting***

Like FOMO, ghosting has been widely reported in the mass media and become a subject of research. The accepted definition of ghosting is to abruptly terminate all online communications with someone. This practice can include blocking someone on Facebook without explanation. Any relationship that has some form of technological mediation, such as keeping in touch on Facebook, has the risk of instant termination (Freedman, Powell, Le & Williams, 2018).

A person has the right to terminate any Facebook friendship for any reasons. While this is accurate, ghosting can have mental health implications as Navarro, Larrañaga, Yubero and VÍllora (2020, p. 3) state:

On the Psychology Today website, Jennice Vilhauer claimed that ghosting can have a serious impact on a person’s mental health. She explained that “ghosting is the ultimate use of the silent treatment, a tactic that has often been viewed by mental health professionals as a form of emotional cruelty. It essentially renders you powerless and leaves you with no opportunity to ask questions or be provided with information that would help you emotionally process the experience. It silences you and prevents you from expressing your emotions and being heard, which is important for maintaining your self-esteem”

LeFebvre et al. (2019) argues that mental distress occurs from a breakup that depends on several factors, such as the type of relationship dissolution, hence why sudden cut off ghosting can be distressing. If someone cuts off a Facebook friendship there are other people to find to interact with. Yet ghosting has potential mental health effects on people from this form of rejection and silence, making it a valid negative use of Facebook

### ***Human Sleep Issues***

Sleep patterns and quality of sleep can be interrupted if people use their mobile/cell phones late at night and in bed. The light emitted from the phone and its effect on the brain has been studied. What has been suggested is that bright light in the evening inhibits the secretion of melatonin which in turn can delay the onset of drowsiness and sleep (Bowler & Bourke, 2018, p. 1; Chang, Aeschbach, Duffy & Czeisler, 2014; Cajochen et al. 2011). In their study, Bowler and Bourke (2018) noted that even short bursts of exposure to phone brightness, such as 15 to 30 minutes, produces a significant difference in sleep quality. Therefore, this is a valid negative use of Facebook, and of mobile/cell phones as it is easy to take devices to bed and use them, thus possible interfering in quality and hours of sleep.

## *Privacy Risks*

Giving your data to Facebook entails many privacy and data misuse risks. However, it is also what is posted that risks one's privacy. Examples include: posting provocative photos of one's self resulting in getting unwanted posts and messages, posting photos that show you in compromising situations such as being intoxicated that risk ridicule and effects chances of getting a job<sup>12</sup>, as well as being trolled or bullied.

One risk that has received much media coverage is posting if the user is going to have a party. Often this does include putting the user's home address in the post. This practice has occurred globally and has had consequences ranging from rioting, arrests, vandalism and physical violence. Neighbours of where the party is held can also sustain property damage or be harassed or injured by uninvited party goers.

What occurs is the post is shared all over Facebook to people who are often not friends of the Facebook user who is having the party. Although not every person who attends the party is a criminal, such elements have been known to invite themselves to the party to sell drugs or take property. Some examples over time reported in the media include:

(In Holland) 16-year-old girl posted an invitation to her birthday party on Facebook and wasn't quite au fait with the privacy controls.

Her little hometown became somewhat tense at the idea of thousands descending upon its leafy parts to party, for 30,000 people ended up receiving the invitation.

The girl cancelled the party, but some 4,000 people still turned up in the hope of a little twisting and shouting. They were greeted by 600 riot police, which can't have done too much for Haren's tourism industry. (Matyszczuk, 2012)

A Facebook page posting details of Sunshine Coast party locations has grown in popularity overnight.

The site, which attracted more than 950 "likes" in less than a week, grew to more than 1000 supporters after a story in the Daily yesterday.

The page was established to urge people to post the times and locations of open house parties held on the Coast.

Gatecrash Security managing director Mark Ellis said anyone who posted open house details online was asking for trouble.

"I can almost guarantee there will be violence, assault and property damage," Mr Ellis said. (Clifford, 2013)

A NSW teen says she has called in the police after her Facebook birthday party invitation went viral with almost 200,000 people threatening to show up.

The 15-year-old's home and mobile phones have been bombarded with calls and text messages from strangers because she had put her mobile number on a Facebook event birthday party invite that was made publicly available.

On the Facebook invitation, the girl said she didn't have enough time to invite everyone. She therefore asked for people, if they knew someone who might like to go, to invite them on her behalf. (Grubb, 2011)

This privacy risk of holding a party and making it known to potentially thousands of people is negative use of Facebook. Checking privacy controls before posting the party's details is highly advised. In this digital age it is more likely people will advertise parties on social media, making this a problem for the user, the police, the neighbours and people who were attending the party invited.

## **Conclusions and Summary**

This chapter has discussed Facebook issues that are seen as negative to the user, the platform and society. Facebook trolling, and argueing, is a major reason for people avoiding news site pages, reducing their Facebook use or even leaving the platform. The examples of controversial issues showed how unpleasant a platform it can become, though there is a choice to participate in it and manage it through blocking people. Facebook addiction is a major recognised issue, where users become almost slaves to the platform on a psychological and emotional level. The discussion of the unpleasant use of Facebook Live in New Zealand alerts us to the potential misuse of live streaming. Finally, four other negative uses of Facebook were discussed that show the variety of issues that can affect the platform and user.

Chapter Five discusses three substantial controversies that have affected Facebook and its users as its growth continued.

## Notes

- 1 Quote obtained from Libby-Jane Charleston (2018) from 9Honey website.
- 2 Quote obtained from Dr Brent Conrad (2019), clinical psychologist, TechAddiction.
- 3 Quote obtained from John Kennedy (2019) from Silicon Republic website.
- 4 Two of the comments are from Facebook posts from my Facebook friends, one is an anonymous public comment from a user, and the rest were obtained from the World Wide Web.
- 5 A short and concise outline of Suler's work is available at the website Learning Theories at <https://www.learning-theories.com/online-disinhibition-effect-suler.html>
- 6 I explored adult cyberbullying and trolling in two books (Nycyk, 2017; Nycyk, 2015b) and although there can be an overlapping of what they mean, cyberbullying is characterised by repeated behaviours whilst trolling is, as defined by Phillips 2015, Bishop 2012 and Hardaker 2010 as baiting, provoking and threatening other online Internet users.
- 7 Disclaimer: this sentence is a general observation and does not reflect my personal view on vaccinations.
- 8 There are many extensive debates about the terms 'ethnic' and 'race' that although are outside the scope of this book, need to be acknowledged. Both can be used as forms of discrimination against others especially. To clarify a definition, the website Diffen.com (n.d.) states the difference between the two as:
 

The traditional definition of race and ethnicity is related to biological and sociological factors respectively. Race refers to a person's physical characteristics, such as bone structure and skin, hair, or eye color. Ethnicity, however, refers to cultural factors, including nationality, regional culture, ancestry, and language.
- 9 The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) is a publication for the classification of mental disorders using a common language and standard criteria. It is published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and is used by clinicians, researchers, psychiatric drug regulation agencies, health insurance companies, pharmaceutical companies, the legal system, and policy makers (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, n.d.).
- 10 Original quote by Hu, Kim, Siwek and Wilder (2017), using quotes from studies by Lee, Moore, Park and Park (2012) and Forest and Wood (2012). Both the 2012 studies are referenced in Works Cited.
- 11 This is standard general advice that is often given as addiction can be a major health problem. Seek advice from medical professionals with this addiction.
- 12 This topic will be discussed at length in Chapter Six.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## THREE SIGNIFICANT FACEBOOK CONTROVERSIES EXAMINED

### **Facebook Algorithms:**

With each millimeter we collectively scrolled, Facebook's deep learning algorithms collected more and more data about our information consumption patterns, and learned the way we intake data - and sorted out that beyond all the complexities of a 4 billion-year-old evolutionary product, our species is freaking addicted, and that our dopamine centers put up impressive thunderstorms whenever we scroll through the newsfeed - and their algorithms could pick up the surges in our hormones. - Ashif Shereef, The Start Up<sup>1</sup>

### **Facebook and Cambridge Analytica:**

Facebook is in another awkward situation. The company claims that it wasn't breached, and that while it has suspended Cambridge Analytica from its service, the social giant is not at fault. Facebook contends that its technology worked exactly how Facebook built it to work, but that bad actors, like Cambridge Analytica, violated the company's terms of service. - Kurt Wagner, Vox<sup>2</sup>

### **Facebook and Fake News:**

The term "fake news" has lost much of its meaning, but it describes a real and dangerous internet trend. Because it's hard for many people to differentiate a real news site from a fraudulent one, they can be hoodwinked by fictitious news stories pretending to be real. The result is that otherwise reasonable people believe lies. - Bruce Schneier, Schneier on Security<sup>3</sup>

In Chapter Two's historical account of Facebook to 2020, it was shown how the platform has been involved in a number of widely reported controversies. These have had widespread consequences for Facebook, but also for society. A number of issues, including data privacy and questions over ethical conduct of the platform, have arisen to challenge Facebook as it lost much user and public trust.

This chapter explores three controversies that have been at the forefront of criticisms of Facebook. These are:

1. The creation and use of computer algorithms drawn from user data
2. The Cambridge Analytica scandal that eroded user trust of Facebook
3. The proliferation of fake news that had the power to interfere in other nation's democracies

In each section the background of these controversies is explained followed by an analysis of the wider implications of these, demonstrating how they damaged Facebook's reputation.

## Facebook Algorithms

A computer algorithm is widely used for commercial, social, human and marketing purposes, functioning as encoded computer code with sets of defined procedures and calculations that transform inputted data into desired output (Gillespie, 2014). As discussed in Chapter Two, the Facebook News Feed algorithm has been controversial in the platform's history. This section discusses these issues.

Gillespie's definition of an algorithm is technical, but Willson's (2016, p. 4-5) metaphoric description comparing the algorithm to a cake recipe shows well how these operate:

To describe algorithmic processes, the analogy of a recipe is often employed. A recipe has a particular identified end point - a meal, or a cake, for example. What the recipe provides is a list of ingredients (contributing items or variables), but more importantly, it also contains a step-by-step description of a process that outlines what needs to happen and when, what needs to be combined or separated and when, following a very specific, detailed order. It also needs to be written in a way that the user will understand and be able to follow. Similarly, an algorithm considers particular variables or items that need to be included or excluded, particular steps to be followed in a particular order and a number of decision or action points to be identified and negotiated eventually to result in a desired outcome or end point. The algorithm is formulaic with an identified function or role that determines the steps and the processes that are employed. It is also relational in that it needs to communicate with other systems and structures with which it interacts; it needs to be able to speak to or be read by other systems and entities. In that sense, it articulates a particular operating logic.

Concerns have been raised about these programs as they grow in use by governments and business to mine peoples' personal data. Seaver (2013, p. 419) argues algorithms are not standalone little boxes but massive, networked ones with hundreds of hands reaching into them, tweaking and tuning, swapping out parts and experimenting with new arrangements. These can tell us what a user of a system should be seeing (Willson, 2016). They can also set criteria on results meaning they can be designed to exclude people based on age, race, geographic location or other human features.

The significance of this problem for Facebook is in how their algorithm affects user attitudes towards using it. Users may resent its influence on their viewing their News Feed posts despite the good intentions Facebook had in redesigning it in 2018. These made users feel they were being manipulated and seeing content they did not want to see. Feelings of annoyance could have the effect of people ceasing logging in because this content is overwhelming.

Zuckerberg and Facebook, after receiving criticism since the 2016 United States Presidential Election political advertising issues, decided to change the News Feed algorithm. In this message<sup>4</sup> extract Zuckerberg (2018) stated the problem, acknowledged dissatisfied user feedback with the News Feed and stated the move from the platform providing a content finding focus to what is termed 'meaningful interaction' would be a priority:

We built Facebook to help people stay connected and bring us closer together with the people that matter to us. That's why we've always put friends and family

at the core of the experience. Research shows that strengthening our relationships improves our well-being and happiness.

But recently we've gotten feedback from our community that public content - posts from businesses, brands and media - is crowding out the personal moments that lead us to connect more with each other.

The research shows that when we use social media to connect with people we care about, it can be good for our well-being. We can feel more connected and less lonely, and that correlates with long term measures of happiness and health. On the other hand, passively reading articles or watching videos - even if they're entertaining or informative - may not be as good.

Based on this, we're making a major change to how we build Facebook. I'm changing the goal I give our product teams from focusing on helping you find relevant content to helping you have more meaningful social interactions.

We started making changes in this direction last year, but it will take months for this new focus to make its way through all our products. The first changes you'll see will be in News Feed, where you can expect to see more from your friends, family and groups.

As we roll this out, you'll see less public content like posts from businesses, brands, and media. And the public content you see more will be held to the same standard - it should encourage meaningful interactions between people.

The elements of what are these meaningful interactions are interpreted by social media and analytics company Sysomos (2019, p. 13) as being:

- Average time user spent on content
- Completeness of user's profile page
- Commenting or like a person's photo or status update (the most common element)
- Engagement with any brand post shared by a friend
- How informative a post is
- Multiple replies to users' comments on a video

With these elements factored into the creation of the new Facebook News Feed Algorithm, users would likely notice an absence of other types of content in their personal News Feed. Adam Mosseri, in 2018 as head of Facebook's News Feed, explained the benefits of the new algorithm, stating posts from friends and family are now priority over public content (Mosseri, 2018a)<sup>5</sup>:

With this update, we will also prioritize posts that spark conversations and meaningful interactions between people. To do this, we will predict which posts you might want to interact with your friends about, and show these posts higher in feed. These are posts that inspire back-and-forth discussion in the comments and posts that you might want to share and react to - whether that's a post from a friend seeking advice, a friend asking for recommendations for a trip, or a news article or video prompting lots of discussion.

Because space in News Feed is limited, showing more posts from friends and family and updates that spark conversation means we'll show less public content, including videos and other posts from publishers or businesses.

Seeing less of the type of content the user does not want to see is a desirable outcome for Facebook users. While hackers, companies, especially marketing departments, and governments have created algorithms that have been detrimental to Internet users, Bozdag and van den Hoven (2015) argue algorithms have been created to stop misuse of user data. For all the negative comments made about the Facebook algorithm, using it helped the user feel they are under less bombardment by fake news and other content they do not want to see.

There exists a problem of ignorance around the Facebook algorithm. Many algorithms are proprietary owned inaccessible to outside critique and their parameters, intent and assumptions indiscernible (Willson, 2016, p. 4). Well before the implementation of the News Feed algorithm, researchers and Internet commentators were questioning the uses of the algorithm. Engineers and designers must make value-based decisions and judgements to determine what output will be obtained from an algorithm. With Facebook, one example identified by DeVito (2016) is how do those designing the News Feed algorithm define who and what are close friends? This can cause unconscious or conscious bias where values built into them become based on inflexible and discriminatory societal determinates that deliver outcomes not in the person's best interests (DeVito, 2016; Schultz, 2007).

Criticisms of Facebook's News Feed algorithm included accusations that stories appearing in the feed were "working people up" (Cooper, 2020) and that Facebook was acting as a censor of content on the feed (Evans, 2019). Facebook was showing the content the user wanted to see purely to encourage the formation of filter bubbles. This is a form of algorithmic sorting. Lazer (2015, p. 1090) argues this algorithmic sorting has the potential to be unhealthy for our democracy, fostering polarisation and undermining the construction of a vision of the common good.

At the centre of this controversy is even with the change away from public type content in the News Feed that was removed in the new algorithm, Facebook still has the ability to influence content that will appear in the it. Users may approve of the removal of random advertising and other unwanted content. But as Cooper (2020), Evans (2019) and others argue controversial content that maximises engagement with the platform and create filter bubbles is still an ongoing issue. Yet the information to do this comes from Facebook's users' data and content.

For example, in the United States, if the Facebook user is a member of a conservative political party, as are some of their friends and all are identified as gun collectors, stories in the News Feed may be about protests for gun control. The appearance of gun control content may outrage those users, confirming that their freedom to bear arms is under threat. This creation of a worldview similar to one's own interests gathered from Facebook data is seen as a major problem as it stifles debate on political issues.

### **Users Awareness of Facebook Algorithms**

Users may not be aware of the potential manipulation on their Facebook accounts algorithms can be used for. Self-censorship is frowned upon by the users who believe Facebook exists as



a platform of self-expression and freedom of speech. Yet people have become more careful of what they post because their content becomes data that can shape their News Feed. Beer (2009, p. 997) suggests individuals are aware of the negative outcomes of algorithms:

This is not to say that individuals are unable to reflexively play with algorithmic power to their own advantage. It might be that as users begin to see how the information that they provide in the form of content impacts on the constitution of their life-worlds, so they may begin to actively shape the information so as to direct the way that the software reacts to them. Rather than resistance we may encounter reflexive and skilled agents shaping their profiles so as to anticipate the effects the information they provide might have and steer things in the direction they wish - a process we can think of as being about, as The Clash put it, having the right profile.

In their study of Facebook users, Rader and Gray (2015) found from their sample that 48% of participants were aware of the Facebook algorithm's impact on their News Feed. Although unclear how the participants would manage this in the future, such a high percentage suggested widespread knowledge of the potential harm the Facebook algorithm may cause. In Bucher's (2017) study, out of the 25 participants interviewed most disclosed they changed their posted content because they became mindful that it was being used in Facebook algorithms.

To allow users to retain control over what they see in the News Feed, free software called F.B. (Fluff Busting) Purity was launched in 2009. Quoting the site (F.B. Purity, n.d.) it is a Facebook customising browser extension. It alters your view of Facebook to show only relevant information to you. It allows removal of annoying and irrelevant posts from your News Feed such as game and application spam, ads and sponsored posts. Such software assists in managing what you see or do not on Facebook, but the platform still has some of the user's data as its main source to run algorithms on its users.

The Facebook News Feed algorithm has been controversial because it promised a better user Facebook experience but delivered potential problems that have not been welcomed. The algorithm discovers our behaviours through user posted content and reinforces our own worldview of issues. Sometimes those worldviews can be outdated or incorrect with users living in a filter bubble that supports what we want to see, not what is actually occurring in the world.

## **Facebook and Cambridge Analytica**

In this section an expanded history of the Cambridge Analytica data scandal, introduced in Chapter Two, is discussed showing the potential way a user's data can be used to target them. The implications for Facebook and for society are also analysed and discussed because although we are aware our online data is not always private, we do not expect our own data to be used to influence our lives. Many condemn the deceit Cambridge Analytica exercised upon Facebook users and their data as well as Facebook's lack of response to rescuing user data. As our data is further used by social media companies and others, we have a right to expect it to be used for us, not against us, which this controversy exemplifies. This section will look at the scandal in a historical context, discussing the people and organisations involved in it and a discussion of the United States congressional and other hearings that took place.

## Cambridge Analytica Background

Cambridge Analytica was a data analytics company based in London, United Kingdom. It was incorporated into a private company called Strategic Communication Laboratories (SCL) in 2013. Larson and Vieregger (2019, p. 98) explain its origins:

The origins of Cambridge Analytica date to 1993 when Strategic Communication Laboratories Group (SCL) was founded with the idea that, by understanding consumer behavior, a firm might be able to influence the outcomes of elections and other political events. Cambridge Analytica was formed in 2013 by Alexander Nix, a director at SCL, with \$15 million in funding from Robert Mercer, a Republican donor. Donald Trump's political adviser, Steve Bannon, also joined the Board of Directors of the new SCL offshoot.

It ceased operations in 2018. Their focus was on providing research on consumers for governments and corporations. These included the problematic targeted consumer advertising. It would use what is termed 'big data' to gain information on people through user data from those using social media. It is regarded as an unethical practice to not inform people their data is used in a targeted way to get people to consume certain products or believe certain political party information through what is called 'targeted marketing' (Zwitter, 2014).

Figure 91 shows the location in London where Cambridge Analytica existed:



*Figure 91.* London location of Cambridge Analytica offices (Jackson, 2018)

Alexander Nix, director and Chief Executive Officer, became the main character in the revelation of the data breach. Figure 92<sup>6</sup> shows Nix<sup>7</sup> presenting at a caucus meeting in the United States:

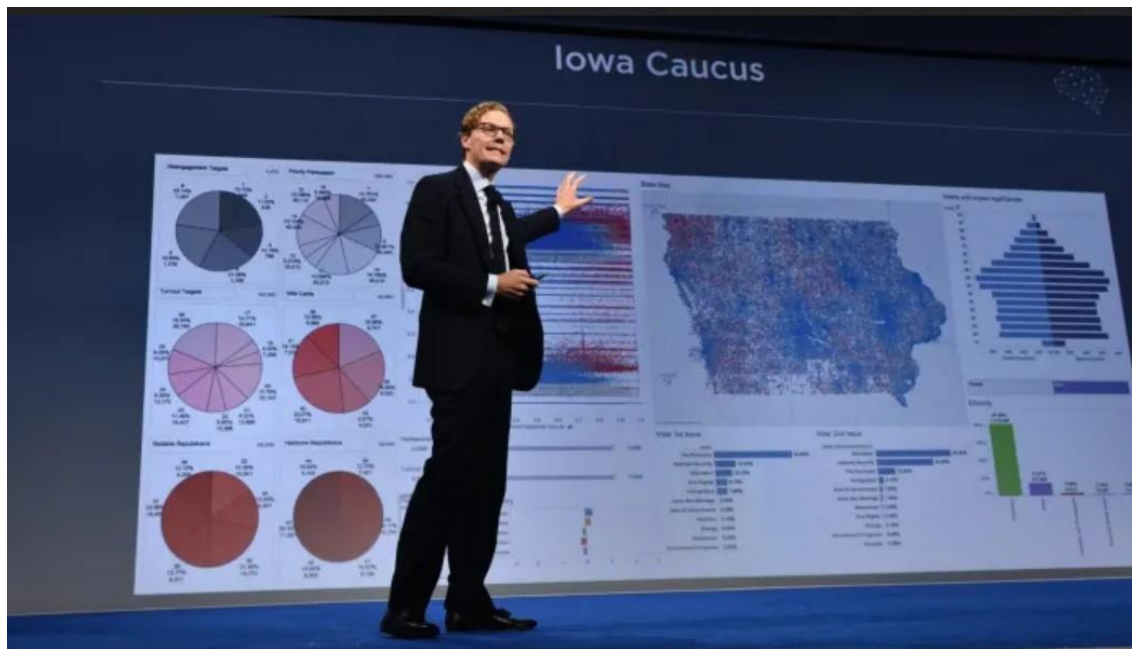


Figure 92. Alexander Nix Chief Executive Officer Cambridge Analytica ( Fildes, 2018)

In 2016, Nix gave an interview discussing the level of technological insight into processes used in analysing big data. What is interesting is how the company developed a model of persuading people that, although advertising has done this over decades, demonstrates how sophisticated these techniques have become (Contagious, 2016):

‘Specifically, it was trying to understand how you could integrate science with communication to replace creativity; not in its entirety - creativity is still often used in the execution - but certainly in research and strategy.

‘This was important was because the clients we were interested in servicing were not necessarily vendors of products like Mars Bars [...] We work with governments, militaries and aid agencies on things where simply taking a creative approach and hoping it resonates – the “Beanz meanz Heinz” and “Coca Cola is it” stuff – isn’t going to work.

Cambridge Analytica combines SCL’s research on behaviour and psychology with data modelling and analytics to create ‘a workable model of persuasion’, as Nix puts it.

‘The business model was to leverage [SCL’s] global political track record to enter the US political market and then use the US political market to showcase [Cambridge Analytica’s] products and services, such that we could then pivot into the commercial and brand space.

People do expect that the data they hand over to companies will be entered into databases and used for marketing and research. Profiling is taken for granted as part of social media practice. Many organisations will disclose that they use personal data for profiling and may offer ways of opting out of this.

The problem of user profiling has been the inappropriate and unwanted use of personal data. People want protection for their data as it can be used, as the Cambridge Analytica case will show, for sinister purposes. The advantages and disadvantages of profiling are highlighted in these two views:

The core purpose of profiling is for the platforms to simply better understand their customers and develop their services. User profiles for individuals or groups allow targeting and personalisation of the offering based on user needs and preferences, and practical examples of making use of this knowledge include tailoring of services, price-discrimination, fraud detection and filtering of either services or users (Auvinen, 2018).

But the practice of online profiling has come under intense scrutiny. Many lawmakers and privacy advocates say they're concerned that online profiling can be used to learn a customer's political and religious views, sexual orientation or medical conditions - information that can be sold and shared in a networked world (Thibodeau, 2000).

A historical example of profiling, thwarted by the efforts of double agent Frenchman René Carmille, occurred in 1940 when the German Nazi Party tried to profile voters' religions in a French Census. This was to find out if they were Jewish. Over the two years of the census data collection, he and his group continuously, and without detection until 1944 mishandled the punch cards the data was on and reprogrammed the punch card machines (Nycyk, 2018; Murphy, 2017; Wills, 2017; Davis, 2015). The Nazi Party, occupying France at that time, as a result of Carmille's work could not find out from the census data who were Jewish. This example illustrates the consequences of potential profiling and what it can do to influence the course of history. The Cambridge Analytica case which sort to find out Facebook users' political preferences and influence them was somewhat a similar scenario to Carmille's.

### **Cambridge Analytica's Data Breach Scandal**

The Cambridge Analytica data breach was revealed in 2018 but its origins began in 2010. This section discusses the timeline of events<sup>8</sup> that lead to Facebook's reputation being damaged severely by this scandal. To overview the scandal, Figure 93 summarises the main incidents:

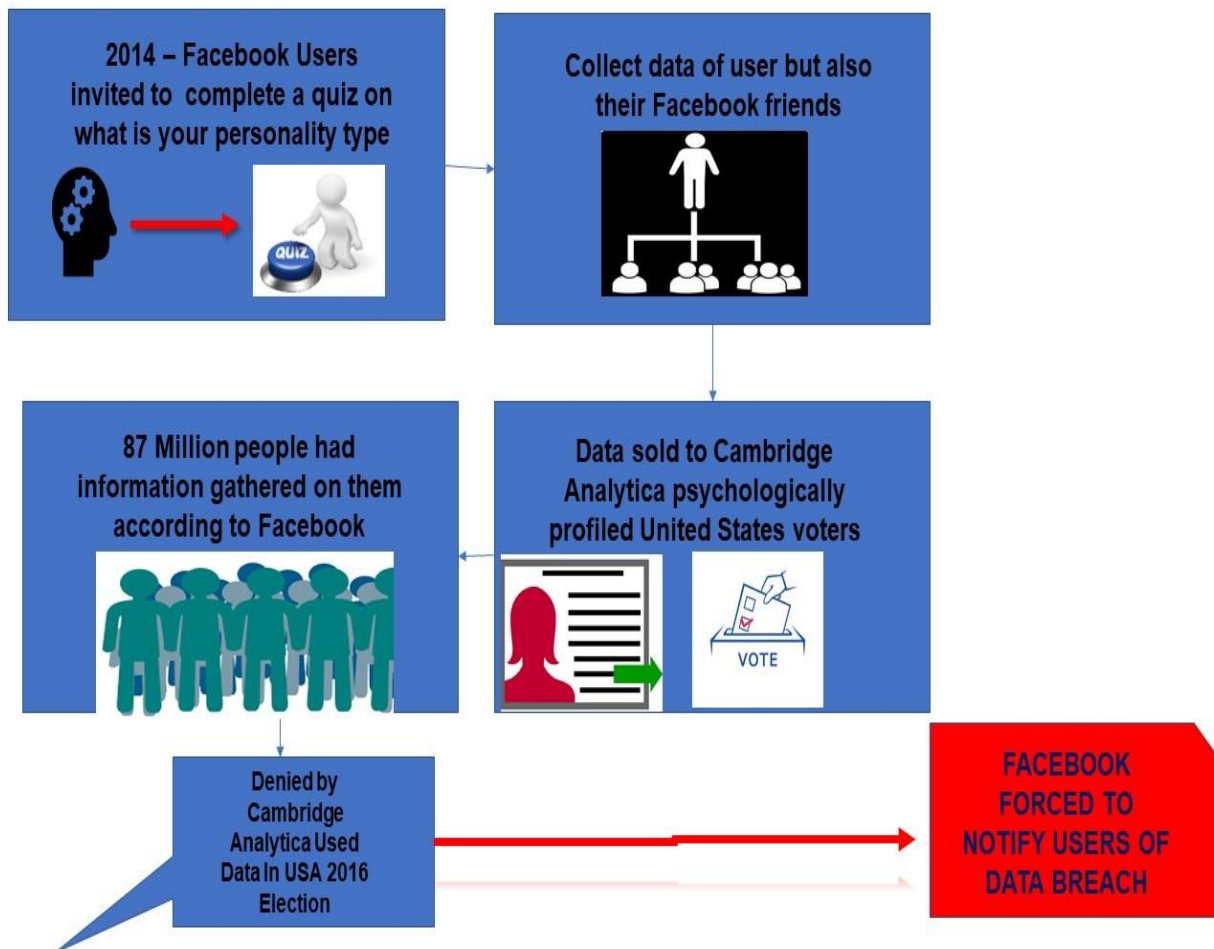


Figure 93. The Cambridge Analytica data breach

### The Open Graph Platform as Data Collection Software

In 2008 Facebook created an application called Facebook Connect that allowed users to interact with external websites. The aim was to access a third-party website through using Facebook as a single sign-on. When the user chooses to access the third-party site through Facebook Connect that website retrieves the user's Facebook information including name, wall posts, photos and especially friend information (Rouse, 2010). This was the beginning of the issue of sharing user Facebook data.

In April 2010 Facebook launched the Open Graph Application Programming Interface (API) that was available to third-party apps. As Overland (2010) explains, the operation, and problem, of Open Graph was that it allowed external developers to contact Facebook users, request permission to view users' personal data and to access users' Facebook friends' personal data. It used this data without user consent for what it was actually going to be used for. Mining<sup>9</sup> for personal data while commonly used in society and business has potentially negative outcomes that this scandal illustrates.

### The App that Shared Data Deceptively

Data scientist Dr Aleksandr Kogan (see Figure 94), a research associate at the United Kingdom university Cambridge, was engaged by Cambridge Analytica to develop an app.

This development began in 2014 by him under his name and his company Global Science Research:



*Figure 94.* Aleksandr Kogan data scientist and creator of This is your Digital Life App in 2014 (Holton, 2018)

The name of the app was *This Is Your Digital Life* (also known as “thisisyourdigitallife”). Larson and Vieregger (2019, p. 101) describe what occurred after Kogan delivered the app to Cambridge Analytica and the problem of API’s ability to collect others’ data not just the users, but their friends as well:

The API at the heart of this case is a Facebook API that developers could embed in their own applications. The API prompted users for permission to access their Facebook profiles. An academic researcher, Alexander Kogan, leveraged the Facebook API to develop a survey application and then asked users to respond to a series of questions on that application via the Amazon platform, Amazon Mechanical Turk. Individuals were told that the survey was for academic research and were compensated for their participation.

As Larson and Vieregger (2019) further state, Kogan obtained user profile data from Facebook but there was no violation of the conditions of the Facebook API.

He was then substantially questioned about the Cambridge Analytica data breach by his university, governments and the media. Although he created a new data analytic firm, with other Cambridge academics, called Philometrics, there was some damage to his reputation.

He stated in the mass media that he had been unfairly scapegoated by Facebook and Cambridge Analytica, the firm that acquired the user information (Weaver, 2018). He launched a defamation claim in 2019 (ALEKSANDR KOGAN, Plaintiff, v. FACEBOOK, INC., PAUL GREWAL, ALEX STAMOS, and MARK ZUCKERBERG, Defendants, Case No.1:19-cv-02560-PAE) with this extract showing how the alleged defamation claim (United States District Court Southern District of New York, 2019, p. 17):

Defendants knew that Dr. Kogan was not a liar, a scammer, or a fraud, and knew he obtained access to Facebook user data the same way all developers did. This is evidenced by the fact that Facebook was negotiating a settlement with the FTC regarding, among other things, their practice of allowing developers this exact access, at the same time that Facebook was using Dr. Kogan as a public scapegoat for these practices and calling him a liar and a fraud.

Cambridge University also released a statement which as at July 2020 can still be read online. In it the university stated it had questioned Dr Kogan and had exonerated him publically stating, as this extract illustrates (Cambridge University, 2018):

It is not uncommon for Cambridge academics to have business interests, but they must satisfy the University that these are held in a personal capacity and that there are no conflicts of interest.

We have previously sought and received assurances from Dr Kogan that no University resources or facilities and none of the data collected for his academic research were used for his work with GSR or the company's subsequent work with any other party.

We understand from Dr Kogan that he originally created a Facebook app for academic research; however, he states that when the app was repurposed for use by GSR, it was rebranded and released with new terms and conditions, and it was made clear that this was commercial, not academic, research.

Facebook has made a series of allegations surrounding Dr Kogan's use of data. The University of Cambridge takes matters of research integrity and data protection extremely seriously. We have to date found no evidence to contradict Dr Kogan's previous assurances; nevertheless, we have written to Facebook to request all relevant evidence in their possession.

### **Cambridge Analytica and the 2016 US Presidential Election**

In using the thisisyourdigitallife app that formed a psychological profile of the user and their friends, an estimated 300 000 users were paid to do the survey, in turn having their personal data harvested for microtargeting (Meredith, 2018). In this case the microtargeting was personalised communication gained from the collection of user information and using that information to show them targeted political advertisements, matching the user's electorate concerns with political campaigns (Borgesius, et al., 2018).

The 2016 United States Presidential Election was marked by a fierce rivalry between the Republican Party led by candidate Donald Trump, and the Democratic Party led by candidate Hillary Clinton. Ideological issues and voter dissatisfaction with Barack Obama left

Americans feeling disenfranchised. An additional issue that promoted fear was the use of a phenomenon called the culture wars<sup>10</sup> where blame for the state of American society was placed upon minorities and other nations, as seen in Donald Trump's pitch to the voters to build a wall at the Mexican border. Additionally, fake news, mostly against Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders and other members of the Democratic Party, coming from other countries fueled the uncertainty that pushed voters towards voting for Trump.

Trump's campaign was built on demonising the opposition including using many issues regarding the alleged moral and personal conduct of opponent Hilary Clinton. The rise of the right and alternative right (alt right) with conservative to extreme views was supported by the use of social media content denigrating Clinton and others. In this quote, Brabazon, Redhead and Chivaura (2018), drawing on the ideas in an article by Eggen and Farnam (2011), shows the platform Trump took to appeal to United States voters:

The election of Donald Trump solidifies that the shift to right wing political ideas is not coming or emerging. It is here. We wish to be clear: Trump is not the carefully calculating, natural leader of the Right. Controversial as it might be, Donald Trump was a chancer that captured conservative anxieties about the weak and weakening ties between nationalism, whiteness and power. Prior to 2012, Trump was never a voice of the right. He had been aligned with Democratic political views

Reviewing Trump's campaign as compared to Obama's previous campaigns, Trump did not emphasize issues of policy and governance. Instead, his focus was more on nationalist sentiments and how he could be seen as the saviour of the white race. The multicultural nature of the United States was viewed as a danger to the imagined singular whiteness that narrativized the nation's origins and actively erased indigenous dispossession.

It is suggested by this quote that Trump would play on the growing fears Americans held for their country. This was supported by the data harvesting and profiling that occurred that Cambridge Analytica played a large role in providing (The Verge, 2018).

Trump's presidential campaign team hired Cambridge Analytica in 2016. It was done, according to Cruz and de Oliveira Dias (2020, p. 71), to identify potential voters to be targeted. This was not only done for Donald Trump but also Republican political candidate Ted Cruz. Guardian reporter Harry Davies (2015) claimed in 2015 about Ted Cruz and Cambridge Analytica the following:

As part of an aggressive new voter-targeting operation, Cambridge Analytica – financially supported by reclusive hedge fund magnate and leading Republican donor Robert Mercer - is now using so-called “psychographic profiles” of US citizens in order to help win Cruz votes, despite earlier concerns and red flags from potential survey-takers.

Documents seen by the Guardian have uncovered longstanding ethical and privacy issues about the way academics hoovered up personal data by accessing a vast set of US Facebook profiles, in order to build sophisticated models of users' personalities without their knowledge.



In the race to advance data-driven electioneering strategies pioneered by successive Obama campaigns, Cruz has turned to Cambridge Analytica for its unparalleled offering of psychological data based on a treasure trove of Facebook “likes”, allowing it to match individuals’ traits with existing voter datasets, such as who owned a gun.

In later years Cambridge Analytica’s practices would also be linked to the United Kingdom Brexit vote issues. That Cruz was proven to have used Cambridge Analytica for user profiling in 2015 was concerning, but overall did not make users and the public demand changes in the same way later data breaches would. People may object to their data being used for such purposes, but it may not have bothered many users at that time. For the 2016 Presidential Election voter information was placed in a large database called Project Alamo.

### **Profiling Users**

To target voters, specialised software is used to profile the user’s and their friends’ views on various issues. The *thisisyourdigitallife* app asked specific questions in relation to well-being, longevity and happiness using a Five Factors, also called the OCEAN, model of personality. Although developed by several researchers, it was John Digman (1990) of the Department of Psychology, University of Hawaii who explained in a lengthy paper<sup>11</sup> how it operates. The profile tool OCEAN makes categories out of users according to their ‘Openness’, ‘Conscientiousness’, ‘Extraversion’, ‘Agreeableness’ and ‘Neuroticism’.

Why the Cambridge Analytica data breach and the use of data to microtarget users are seen to undermine democracy was identified by six reasons according to Jonathan Heawood (2018) of company Impress. These are:

1. The exploitation of personal data without user consent
2. Concealing its true nature, where the political advert on Facebook disguises itself as something else
3. Private claims made by political parties cannot be corrected in the ‘marketplace of ideas’ which means something said in private can turn out to be a false promise or lie
4. Lies in the form of misinformation done openly without scrutiny
5. Microtargeting is harmful because it allows political parties to make incompatible promises to different segments of the electorate (Heawood, 2018, p. 431)
6. Microtargeting allows political actors outside our own country to target us with misinformation or disinformation (Heawood, 2018, p. 431)

The Facebook advertisements were tailored to users based on the OCEAN model specifically to influence voters’ choices. Using fear and disinformation, the ability to convince voters to favour a candidate that may not have the voter’s best interests in their policies is a real, tangible possibility. It can be argued that people can exercise their freedom of choice and ignore such advertisements, but this practice is still viewed as unethical. Social media like Facebook does influence people to think and view the world in certain ways, so such practices for political or other gains are considered unethical.

Another person who played a part in the Cambridge Analytica data breach scandal was Steve Bannon, a White House Chief Strategist for Trump who was also on the board of Cambridge Analytica. His name is linked to the creation of the data gathering tool as will be discussed shortly. A website called the ADL claims Steve Bannon supports the Alt Right and have made statements against Muslims and women (ADL, 2020). While there is no claim here of Bannon's ideology being involved in this scandal, it does illustrate the power of such tools to microtarget and profile. If a person in power, or those supporting them, hold conservative views and want to obtain power, the social media platforms have proven influence they can harness data to do so.

### **Christopher Wiley and Whistleblowing: The Scandal Erupts in 2018**

The next significant event in this data breach was the decision by a previous anonymous source that was passing information in 2017 to the media to go public:



*Figure 95.* Whistleblower Christopher Wiley (O'Sullivan, Griffin & Di Carlo, 2018)

Christopher Wylie<sup>12</sup> is a data consultant and expert from Victoria in British Columbia, Canada. Being a volunteer for the Democratic Barack Obama team in 2008, he gained an awareness of data profiling and microtargeting in political campaigns. In 2013 he began work at Cambridge Analytica (then SCL). Carole Cadwalladr (2018) described his obtaining the job and his being unaware of the scandal that was to occur:

Wylie holds a British Tier 1 Exceptional Talent visa - a UK work visa given to just 200 people a year. He was working inside government (with the Lib Dems) as a political strategist with advanced data science skills. But no one, least of all him, could have predicted what came next. When he turned up at SCL's offices in Mayfair, he had no clue that he was walking into the middle of a nexus of defence and intelligence projects, private contractors and cutting-edge cyberweapony.

Wylie told Cadwalladr from 2017 to 2018 about the activities of Cambridge Analytica and the link to Donald Trump's presidential campaign. The Guardian built up a collection of leaked documents from Wylie releasing them over time in what came to be known as the Cambridge Analytica Files.

Wylie claims in his book (Chan, 2019; Wylie, 2019), that violates some of the six reasons that Heawood (2018) describe as unethical use of microtargeting users, was the personality types of people targeted based on OCEAN personality criteria. The aim was to target any user that was more prone to impulsive anger over issues and conspiracies than others. It would use various methods, such as Facebook group posts, ads, sharing articles to provoke or even creating fake Facebook pages like “I Love My Country” to provoke them (Wylie, 2019). Facebook was also not asking for the user data used to microtarget and profile back from Cambridge Analytica, making these activities a continuing feature of the 2016 United States Presidential Election Campaign.

Wylie appeared in various hearings in the United States and United Kingdom, continuing to explain how the microtargeting worked. In an interview in the United States with Nancy Pelosi and Adam Schiff he described some of his work activities he undertook in the firm, giving an insight into how the data breach was undertaken (Office of the Democratic Leader, 2018):

MR. WYLIE: So the Facebook data - so maybe I will just quickly explain how that project got set up, and then what the utility of it was. So in the spring of 2014, after the investment was made into Cambridge Analytica, the next step in the project was to figure out how to acquire a scaled data set on personally identifying Americans. So which means it's addressable data. It has their name, it has some kind of thing that I can match to the electoral register, and that is also useful for modeling very nuanced human constructs, which are very difficult to model. So it had to be sort of a high-quality type of data, and there had to be a lot of it. When we started working with several of the professors at the Psychometrics Centre at the University of Cambridge, they had access to applications that were authorized by Facebook that allowed them to collect not just the data on the user of that app, but also the data of the friends of that app.

Wylie highlights the problem is that Facebook did not appear to do anything about these procedures and in not doing so led to targeted advertising appearing in users' Facebook feeds. Yet Facebook denied to a United Kingdom Parliamentary Committee the platform had any knowledge of compromised user data.

After leaving Cambridge Analytica, Wylie expressed regret at his role in the data breach scandal after leaving the company to create his own company called Eunoia Technologies. In an interview with Time conducted with Billy Perrigo (2019) he reflected on his role in the data breach scandal especially having the ability by using the data to racialise<sup>13</sup> people:

In the beginning, you're just building databases. It feels very mundane. You're asking people lots of questions, you're playing with models, it doesn't feel like you're going to hurt anyone. In some ways I distanced myself from the reality that these are people. But then when you start to see things like video footage of some of the focus groups that Cambridge Analytica was doing, you realize you were provoking paranoid ideation, racializing people's thinking. It really starts to hit home that you have ended up contributing to manipulating these people's worldviews to a point where they believe things that aren't true, and are engaging in harmful actions and thinking harmful thoughts. You promote racialized thinking at scale or you provoke and encourage misogynistic viewpoints, and you end up harming society. That really bothered me, and I just sort of sat back and

was like, what the hell am I doing? On top of that we had all kinds of really unusual meetings with some really unsavoury people. It just built to a point where I was just like, I can't do this. I'm not going to do this.

As a result of his disclosures, Facebook banned his profile from the platform, as well as his WhatsApp and Instagram accounts. In deciding to reveal the actions of Facebook and Cambridge Analytica, he alerted the public to an insidious practice that still continues. As Popielec (2019, p. 47) states of Wylie's decision to disclose what was occurring:

Information disclosed by Wylie revealed not only the previously unknown techniques of influencing voters, but also caused the image crisis of Facebook and Cambridge Analytica. The issue of the legitimacy of data acquisition, their protection and ways of their use has returned to the public debate once again. The seriousness of the problem was demonstrated, similarly to the information disclosed by Snowden, by the broad interest of the media, public opinion, politicians and public institutions. Comments made by Mark Zuckerberg himself were laconic and not entirely satisfactory, resulted in the American Congress questioning the creator of Facebook and other decision-makers of this social networking site.

Popielec's last paragraph sets the tone for the next stage of the Cambridge Analytica data breach scandal.

### **Investigations, Hearings, #DeleteFacebook Movement and Public Anger**

In 2018 Mark Zuckerberg apologised for the data harvesting and breach of trust in Facebook's biggest scandal. It did not see Facebook disappear, but clearly it caused worldwide anger. As Ward (2018) observes, the creation of filter bubbles where views are aligned with others may give a sense of comfort but can stifle political and policy debates. Zuckerberg promised new accountability to users, including removing developers' data access rights and reducing the amount of user data Facebook would give outside companies.

During this time after the data breach revelations, several consequences occurred. Zuckerberg published in print and online an apology letter:

We have a responsibility  
to protect your information.  
If we can't, we don't deserve it.

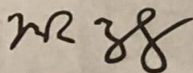
You may have heard about a quiz app built by a university researcher that leaked Facebook data of millions of people in 2014. This was a breach of trust, and I'm sorry we didn't do more at the time. We're now taking steps to make sure this doesn't happen again.

We've already stopped apps like this from getting so much information. Now we're limiting the data apps get when you sign in using Facebook.

We're also investigating every single app that had access to large amounts of data before we fixed this. We expect there are others. And when we find them, we will ban them and tell everyone affected.

Finally, we'll remind you which apps you've given access to your information – so you can shut off the ones you don't want anymore.

Thank you for believing in this community. I promise to do better for you.



Mark Zuckerberg

*Figure 96.* Zuckerberg's apology to Facebook users (Khoury, 2018)

Facebook's share price did drop but not significantly enough to affect the long-term viability of the platform. There was also a concerted effort by Internet users to urge people to delete Facebook in what was called the #DeleteFacebook movement. What was ironic was that

much of this took place on Facebook's rival social network Twitter. However, although the use of Facebook dropped, this movement failed to convince millions of users to delete Facebook permanently. Despite public anger and a tarnished reputation over the use of consumer data, people continued to join and use Facebook.

Facebook had to explain at government hearings in the United States and United Kingdom why this happened and how it would be remedied to not occur again. Zuckerberg had to appear in front of the United States Congress on April 10, 2018 to answer questions about the scandal. He was also asked about Russian interference in Facebook fake news issues. During the hearings, United States politicians from all parties asked Zuckerberg many questions about the harms Facebook seemed to not be managing. He also claimed he did not know about user information was shared by Aleksandr Kogan with Cambridge Analytica. Kogan, as stated previously, took defamation action against Facebook over these claims.

Zuckerberg's defense was to acknowledge that Facebook did not do enough to stop Cambridge Analytica from them not using Facebook user data. He was reported as saying at hearing (Watson, 2018):

“I want to correct one thing that I said earlier in response to a question ... [on] why we didn't ban Cambridge Analytica at the time when we learned about them in 2015.

“[From] what my understanding was ... they were not on the platform, [they] were not an app developer or advertiser. When I went back and met with my team afterwards, they let me know that Cambridge Analytica actually did start as an advertiser later in 2015.

“So we could have in theory banned them then. We made a mistake by not doing so. But I just wanted to make sure that I updated that because I ... I ... I misspoke, or got that wrong earlier.

“When we heard back from Cambridge Analytica that they had told us that they weren't using the data and deleted it, we considered it a closed case. In retrospect, that was clearly a mistake. We shouldn't have taken their word for it. We've updated our policy to make sure we don't make that mistake again.”

The admission of the mistake was carefully worded, but acknowledged the failure of Facebook to protect users from microtargeting. An estimated 87 million Facebook users having their data used without consent was connected in some way with Donald Trump's victory, although this is difficult to conclusively prove. Lawmakers worldwide viewed the case closely as their citizens would demand greater accountability from Facebook. The European Union, in particular, views data privacy generally more seriously than other nations. Other questions were debated with people at the hearing asking if Facebook had become too big a platform to manage.

Responses from other countries were swift as governments expressed concern over Facebook and Cambridge Analytica. Many lawsuits began to be filed. Actions against Facebook included:

- The governments of India and Brazil issuing Cambridge Analytica a demand for the company to report if any political parties in their country used such data in the same way as the United States election.
- Lawsuits from individual areas of the United States, such as the District of Columbia, Washington, and Cook County, Chicago were filed against Facebook.
- The United Kingdom Information Commissioner's office fined Facebook for not protecting user data as Facebook had committed to doing so in its Terms of Service.
- The Australian Government Australian Information Commissioner sued Facebook for the data breach.

These among several claims and actions from many countries made Facebook at the hearing, and in later communications with the public, consistently state the new data protection tools and policies it was to develop to protect users. For example, Facebook committed to a new political advertisement policy as described in a public response document to the Energy and Commerce Committee in June 2018 (U.S. House of Representatives, 2018, p. 370-371):

Facebook is committed to transparency for all ads, including ads with political content. Facebook believes that people should be able to easily understand why they are seeing ads, who paid for them, and what other ads those advertisers are running. As such, Facebook only allows authorized advertisers to run ads about elections or issues that are being debated across the country. In order to be authorized by Facebook, advertisers will need to confirm their identity and location. Furthermore, all political and issue ads will include a disclosure which reads: "Paid for by," and when users click on this disclosure they will be able to see details about the advertiser. Users will also be able to see an explanation of why they saw the particular ad. This is similar to the disclosure included on political TV advertisements. We just launched globally View Active Ads, a feature that will enable anyone to see all of the ads an advertiser is currently running by visiting the advertiser's Facebook Page.

The overall assessment of the hearings is that Facebook accepted responsibility, but not liability, for Cambridge Analytica's data breach activities. In not asking for the data's return Facebook faced its biggest scandal to date in its history. It did commit to new ways of preventing this from happening again but as at the time of writing this remains to be proven.

### **Implications for Democracy and Privacy: Researcher Fascination with the Data Breach**

When reading media commentators, academic researchers and others, the consistent and clear consensus is that Facebook betrayed its users by allowing the data to be used by Cambridge Analytica for profiling and microtargeting. Many have likened this to an attack on democratic processes. Regardless if a country's elections are compulsory or not, the right to vote is considered a highly-valued citizen's right. Although any political party will use advertising to persuade the voter to vote for their party, it is considered that it is the individual's choice to vote for a party or candidate without undue pressure or influence. The Cambridge Analytica data breach scandal also led to many studies and commentaries examining the implications of it for democracy and privacy. Its significance in showing the power of data harvesting and mining cannot be underestimated.

Researchers argue the data breaches are an invasion of an individual's privacy and that organisations must be publically transparent for what purposes they use client, customer or user data. Laws passed, or being considered, worldwide attempt to give such protection to users from improper use of their data. Isaak and Hanna (2018, p. 58-59) in examining such policies state important principles underlying data protection and organisational integrity are: public transparency, disclosure for users, and user control and notification mechanisms. They state the way to do this is by implementing these four strategies:

1. The public must be able to learn the types of data being collected by any website or other electronic means, what data is retained, how it is used, and what is shared with third parties (directly or indirectly)
2. For each website and application, users must be able to obtain complete disclosure of the information that is retained about
3. Users must easily be able to identify, terminate, delete, and uninstall any content or applications placed on their devices or cloud service
4. Users must be directly and promptly informed of the loss or misuse of their private information by any organization collecting or storing that information

These principles reference back to the previously mentioned ideas of Gaspard Koenig (2018) who argues that data should always be the property of the user. While this seems unpractical, the constant laws created to protect users are being refined as organisations and governments continue misuse of user data even in the face of fines and other punishments.

The consequences of further data breaches erode public trust in participating in democratic process and political debate. Masruroh and Satria (2018) in their study of the company gave some evidence to suggest Cambridge Analytica incidents will encourage people fearing to express their political views online. The Internet is supposed to be a place for expression of democracy, but this may be further eroded as trust in using it for this purpose declines (Masruroh & Satria, 2018). Data misuse scandals where election choices are influenced call into question an individual's autonomy. But an alternative view has been debated if such scandals are an effective way to influence voters and should be part of the democratic process (Richterich, 2018; Gonzalez 2017). Political advertising should though be about what is offered by a party in their policies, not as a platform to cause moral panic. As Bambauer, (2019) has suggested, the user and friend data Cambridge Analytica collected was actually limited in numbers compared to Facebook's United States membership, and not as much as the popular media made it out to be.

While Bambauer makes an accurate statement, it was still data obtained without consent. Privacy measures and policies are needed as even such a small collection is of concern. Another counter argument downplaying the issue is Manokha (2018, p. 908) who states the extent of the data acquired by Cambridge Analytica is dwarfed by the likes of Google, Facebook, and other types of platforms who routinely collect, analyse and monetise information about individuals.



This means that the Cambridge Analytica data scandal was not actually illegal but was deemed immoral by the media, academics and the public. The website Decision Marketing (2020) describes the scandal as a moral issue:

If Cambridge Analytica only took data that was already publicly available, and data pooling is done across the board, why has it caused national outrage? To refer back to my earlier point: it's a matter of morals. Just because we have the capabilities to harvest consumer data and create assumptions off the back of it, it doesn't mean we should.

Berghel (2018) is even more critical of Cambridge Analytica and data use equating it as a form of abuse of the person's info-space in a Machiavellian type cyberspace. There are constant debates to the extent to which the company helped Donald Trump win the 2016 election, but evidence is not conclusive if it did. Richterich (2018) and Gonzalez (2017) agree that it is not conclusively clear the effectiveness of the targeted advertisements during that election. Rather, as Harari (2015, p. 388) suggests, humans become a form of functional dataism where their experiences are appraised in value according to their usefulness as data-processing mechanisms. That is a further problem when such a position is taken where it benefits a ruling class and enacts control over people who were influenced to vote in a certain way when their fears of the future were presented to them. Two comments from Kaiser and Wylie close this section that describes the power data harvesting, mining and targeted profiling now has over society:

**Brittany Kaiser**<sup>14</sup>

The biggest companies in the world right now are made up of trillions of dollars of digital assets that really, in my opinion, should belong to us as individuals.

**Christopher Wylie**<sup>15</sup>

Cambridge Analytica will try to pick at whatever mental weakness or vulnerability that we think you have and try to wrap your perception of what's real around you, if you are looking to create an information weapon, the battle space you operate in is social media. That is where the fight happens.

## Facebook and Fake News

In this section the examination of fake news as the third controversial issue is discussed. It is considered a substantial problem for society, as seen in the 2016 United States Presidential Election, for news has always shaped public opinion. Fake news though is not new as people have believed gossip, rumour and false headlines in print media and television reports in the past. The Internet has made the spread of fake news fast and often is broadcast to unforgiving audiences that will believe what is published and who cannot, or do not want to, check if they are facts or is something that actually did happen.

Defining fake news is problematic, but an attempt to do so drawing on the research literature begins this section. Six examples of fake news are given to illustrate the problems of misinformation they can cause. It is argued that it has the power to interfere in democratic processes and in other country's political affairs. Facebook has not ignored this issue but has been slow to adequately respond to it, although from 2019 and after the Cambridge Analytica and Facebook Congress hearings, this has changed.

### **Defining Fake News**

Despite difficulties in reaching an adequate definition, certain components of fake news have found their way into defining what it is. Researcher Gelfert (2018, p. 84) argues that fake news is a by design creation used to deceive and create false beliefs in those that read it:

Despite being a new term, 'fake news' has evolved rapidly. This paper argues that it should be reserved for cases of deliberate presentation of (typically) false or misleading claims as news, where these are misleading by design. The phrase 'by design' here refers to systemic features of the design of the sources and channels by which fake news propagates and, thereby, manipulates the audience's cognitive processes.

However, the term has rapidly evolved and been refined, but does include that such news items lack a degree of truth in their presentation and information. Gelfert is correct though in stating it can manipulate a person's cognitive processes where they believe fake news without checking it for validity. It can also encourage bias, re-enforcing stereotyping of people and cause online mobbing and arguments.

Three definitions allow an understanding of what is meant by fake news. First, a formal technical definition is offered by Lazer et al. (2018, p. 1094) in one of the world's top journals, *Science*, as:

We define "fake news" to be fabricated information that mimics news media content in form but not in organizational process or intent. Fake-news outlets, in turn, lack the news media's editorial norms and processes for ensuring the accuracy and credibility of information. Fake news overlaps with other information disorders, such as misinformation (false or misleading information) and disinformation (false information that is purposely spread to deceive people).

This definition says what is presented to the audience looks like news but is fabricated or made up.

Second definition (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 213):

....news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false, and could mislead readers.

This definition states an action, that what is false could mislead readers into believing something that is not real in terms of the mass media news.

Third definition (Jaster & Lanius, 2018):

On the view we will advance in this paper, fake news is news that does mischief with the truth. That is because, as we argue, fake news is characterized by two shortcomings: it lacks truth and truthfulness. More specifically, fake news is either false or misleading (lack of truth) and it is propagated with either the intention to deceive or an utter disregard for the truth (lack of truthfulness).

Fake news aims to distort truth and misleads readers into believing something that is not true, resulting in usually or commonly, forms of judgement and outrage. Often if it turns out not to be true, many who expressed the outrage will not post online they were wrong to believe the fake news or apologise. Fake news can tarnish peoples' reputations. Gelfert (2018, p. 87) states treating news media as sources of testimonial beliefs emphasises a central role they play in our epistemic lives, often without questioning facts behind that news. Figure 97<sup>16</sup> shows how simple the process of production of fake news is to create angry reactions:

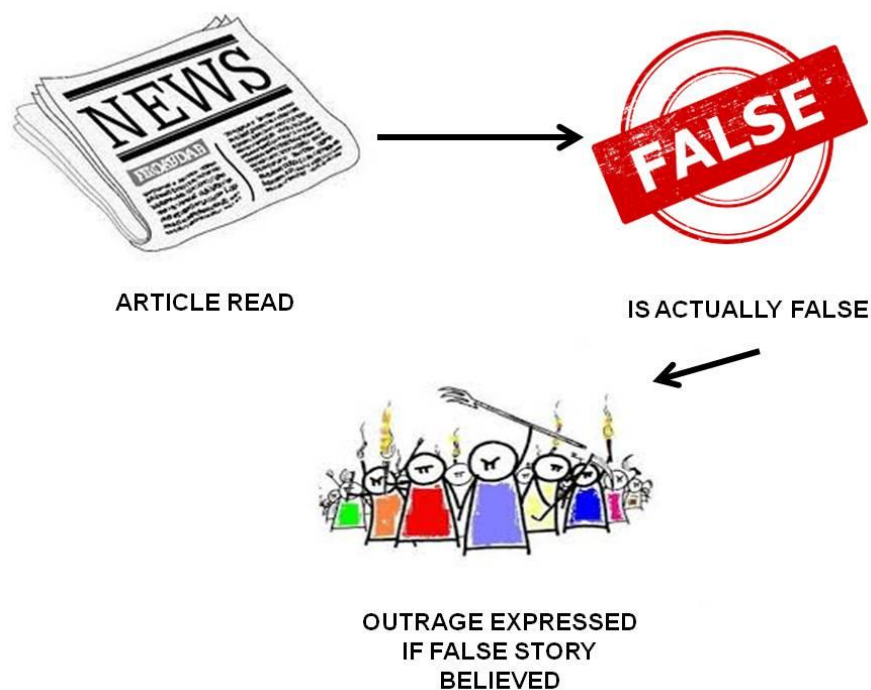


Figure 97. Diagrammatic representation of fake news processes

### Six Examples of Fake News

The following publically published examples of fake news that appeared on Facebook are presented as an illustration of what it looks like. The first is from the Philippines, four from the United States and the sixth from Australia. Each example is accompanied by an explanation of why it is fake news.

### Example 1: An Online Fake Poll of the Popularity of Philippine President Duterte

**Pilipinas Online Updates**  
September 14 · 🌐

Sinundan ito ni [President Obama \(USA\)](#) 87%, [President Vladimir Putin \(Russian Federation\)](#) 86%, [Prime Minsiter Xi Jin Ping \(China\)](#) 86%, [Prime Minister Shinzo Abe \(Japan\)](#) 83%. WOWWW! JUST WOW! I'm with the fact that Tatay Digong is indeed the best! Never been this proud and supportive sa isang Presidente! Sayo lang talaga Tatay Digong. Woooh spread the good news!

**Best President In Solar System**

	<b>Duterte</b>	91%
	<b>Obama</b>	87%
	<b>Putin</b>	86%
	<b>Jin Ping</b>	85%
	<b>Abe</b>	83%

**NASA hailed Duterte as 'the best president in the solar system'**

Opisyal nang kinilala ng National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) si Pangulong Duterte bilang pinakabest na presidente sa b...

KALYEPINOY.COM | BY PILIPINASONLINEUPDATES

1.7K reactions (Like, Love, Wow) · 66 Comments · 1.3K Shares

Like Comment Share

Figure 98. Fake news example President Duterte (Mozur & Scott, 2016)

The post and the voter poll shown on it are both fake as it is unlikely that the United States Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) would authorise a public political poll to rate world leaders. The use of the term 'best president' would make such a poll less credible. People though may think this is a conducted accurate poll especially by the Philippine people.

President Duterte has a worldwide reputation of being a harsh leader. While his 'clean up' of Philippine society has been welcomed, his methods and the use of the police and army to do so, is seen as a form of fascism. Researching media reports and commentaries about his time in power he is portrayed in a way far different from this fake news stories. Two examples are:

Bernstein (2020):

While a majority of Filipinos support Duterte's signature "war on drugs" in principle, they do not approve of the extrajudicial killings that have taken place (the government admits to 6,000 such killings since Duterte's election, whereas human-rights organizations put the figure at more than 20,000). More generally,

it's not hard to find Filipinos, especially among the professional classes - journalists, lawyers, academics - and university students who see Duterte as a grave danger to their country's democratic traditions and rule of law.

Smith (2020):

Duterte now controls every aspect of public administration and there are no checks and balances to his power. The fourth estate is now severely - if not mortally - disabled and Duterte's power absolute, for now.

There are many examples of Duterte's activities as president that contradicts the validity of this fake news poll. People may support his hard-line approach to drugs and other social issues, but the fake news story has some risk that people may believe the poll to be fact. It may have no effect on the Philippines' political system but can serve as propaganda if the poll is not recognised as fake news.

### **Example 2: Actor Denzel Washington did not Support U.S. President Donald Trump**



*Figure 99.* Fake news story about actor Denzel Washington (Mayhew, 2016)

Actor Denzel Washington was reported in the fake news story as making statements supporting the president-elect Donald Trump. In conservative politics, Hollywood and the American acting profession is seen as having a liberal ideology. Liberal means protection of freedoms in the United States such as press, speech and religion. However, it also is criticised because the liberal cause in America supports the legalisation of same-sex marriage, unrestricted voting rights for adults, and civil rights, and are normally pro-choice in the abortion debate (Thomas, n.d.). This is why conservatives criticise liberals contemptuously

and state that liberals hate the United States (Thomas, n.d.). Washington was quoted in the Facebook post as being critical of Hilary Clinton and the Democratic Party.

Using a reference from George Orwell's 1984, he was alleged to have described that if Hilary Clinton had become president, the United States would have become an Orwellian society. Orwellian is often used as a synonym for the word 'authoritarian' where personal freedoms are limited and government surveillance of people is common (Ahlin, 2018; Orwell, 1949). The BBC (2016) reported that the fake news story was taken as fact by readers, especially fans of the actor:

But some Facebook users have been fooled.

One, Anita Ward, said on Facebook: "Kudos to Denzel."

"We need to be a united country not divided, after all it is called United States of America."

"In the name of Jesus, stand up for America and come together, love one another and work together."

Another posted: "He has been my favourite actor for a very long time. Knew there was something special about him. God is his saviour. Thank you, Denzel!"

This reporting quoting two people praising Washington show how people will believe Facebook fake news. Many other comments followed with such praising of what was not said.'

Snopes also reported that Washington had said as part of this fake news that "If the Democrats had won the election, we never would have found out they were using false documents to get warrants to spy on American citizens and political opponents" (Palma, n.d.). Newslit.org (n.d.) also verified it was fake not only on Facebook, but on other social media and a variety of unreliable news websites. Therefore, despite being proven it was fake news and Washington had not made these comments, they were believed as truth and were widely spread.

### Example 3: False Reporting of Hilary Clinton Divorcing her Husband



Figure 100. Fake reporting of Hilary Clinton filing for divorce (Kowalski, (2017)

Hillary Clinton and her husband, former President of the United States, Bill Clinton were both heavily targeted during and after the 2016 Presidential Election. Their private life is well known as Bill Clinton had an affair while being in office and lied about it happening. She was also implicated in various fake scandals such as Pizzagate<sup>17</sup> and constantly had made up news about her appear on social media, especially Facebook.

Figure 100 was placed on Facebook showing an assumed credible source The USA News. Its tone is gleeful over the fake divorce claim saying that her husband “just got served”. At the bottom of the image is a symbol with text saying “Disputed by third Party Fact-Checkers”. This suggested the fake news was found quickly although it is unknown why this post was not removed from Facebook.

By stating fake news about any aspect of her life, it fills a need to have a media villain. It is not clear if those doing this were Republicans all the time. Republican supporters may have been behind this. Commentators and academics have analysed reasons for the hatred directed at her especially using fake news. Two examples include:

For more than two years, Republicans did more than demonize her - they criminalized her, first through the Benghazi hearings (a congressional boondoggle if ever there was one), and later, by representing her use of a personal email server - a politically unwise decision, but one that resulted in not a single felony or misdemeanour charge - as a national emergency. Chants of “Lock Her Up” - Trump’s moniker, “Crooked Hillary - the mock trial staged by Chris Christie, who these days is hardly in a position to threaten anyone with criminal

prosecution. Nothing of this sort has ever transpired in American history. It created a toxic environment and false narrative that may have led especially gullible voters to believe that Clinton, if elected, would face imminent impeachment, removal and imprisonment (Zeitz, 2017).

In assessing the sources of cultural antagonism toward Clinton, it's also important to remember that Hillary is not just a woman, but a feminist -who for better or worse has represented a particular generation of feminists for decades. As an avowed feminist, Clinton's confidence and commitment to the rights of women and children has been admired and continues to be a source of inspiration for millions of progressive women. But from the beginning of her public life it has also fed the antagonism of traditional men, for whom she is the Platonic form of the ball-busting wife no one wants to be married to, and of their wives, who (particularly during an election that branded her as a witch and a bitch) were anxious to distance themselves from her (Broad Agenda, 2018).

It is not an unusual practice in politics to slander with or without evidence other politicians to persuade the voter public someone is not trustworthy. Fake news though has made this a common practice to which Facebook and other social media platforms have been placed under pressure to control.

#### Example 4: Islam Banned in United States Schools

**Anthony F. DeFillipo**  
7 hrs · 🌐

Here comes the sun! America grew balls again!! #USA the integrity of this nation shall never be compromised!!!

**BREAKING – Supreme Court Ruling: NO Islam In Public Schools**

The full panel of nine Supreme Court justices met to decide the fate of Islam taught in public schools. Under Obama's lead schools were teaching that Islam is a...

DONALDTRUMPNEWS.CO

Like Comment Share

👍❤️😂 33

Figure 101. Fake news about banning Islam in public schools (Shammas, 2017)



This story was found to be fake for reporting that the Supreme Court of the United States had made a court ruling on banning the teaching of Islam in public schools. They did not do make this ruling. The rumour had originated on a satirical website, the assumption being someone had decided to post it as a fake news story on Facebook (Spencer, 2018).

### Example 5: False Information Reported about Donald Trump's Family

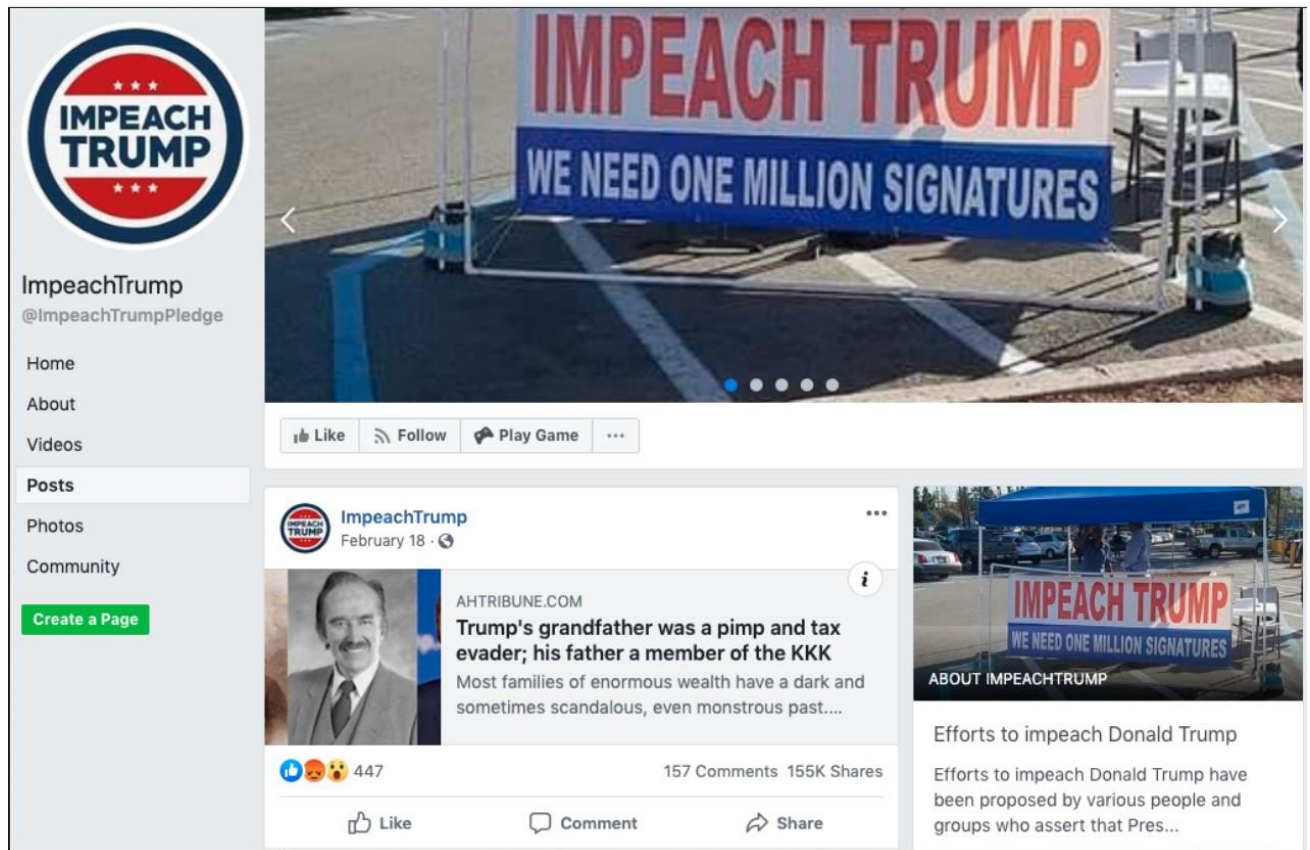


Figure 102. Fake news on ImpeachTrump Facebook page (Gilbert, 2019)

This example shows a story placed on the Facebook page called ImpeachTrump. Lifted from the AH Tribute web site, the headline states allegations about Donald Trump's family. Trump's grandfather was alleged to have been a pimp for prostitutes and evading tax, while Trump's father was seen as a member of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK).

This was found not to have been true even though pictures exist of Trump taken decades before the election showing him standing between his parents. His mother and father are seen to be wearing what appeared to be Klan robes, but this was also not proven despite the look of the robes in the photo looking like they were from the Klan organisation. Donald Trump, being a polarising figure, had this type of fake news published regularly. It was proven by Snopes fact checking that Trump's father, Fred, had been arrested in 1927 in New York in clashes with police at a Memorial Day Parade. But no documentation was made proving he has been, or was, a member of the KKK (LaCapria, 2016).

### Example 6: Fake News around the 2019-2020 Australian Bush Fires



Figure 103. Fake news about the Australia 2019-2020 bushfires (Nguyen & Bogle, 2020)

During late 2019 and early 2020, many parts of Australia experienced fierce bushfires that caused a debate over the role of climate change and lack of pre-bushfire season burning in this disaster. This debate was inflammatory causing many arguments on social media. It became a political left/right divide issue, compounded by Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, deciding to go on holidays to Hawaii while the fires continued. People were looking to blame people, with arsonists and politicians mainly the targets. Mentions of anything involving 'green' politics from environmentalists or green party type supporters would be sharply rebuked by many Facebook users.

Climate change is a contentious issue often played out in terms of political and social media arguing rather than a genuine concern for it that the scientific community has. The definition of it is a change in the pattern of weather, and related changes in oceans, land surfaces and ice sheets, occurring over time scales of decades or longer, usually 30 years (Australian Academy of Science, 2020). Reported effects include: decreased air quality, heat waves, stronger cyclones (hurricanes, tornados), and fires (Last, Trouton & Pengelly, 1998). Climate change scepticism is often posted on Facebook and caring for the environment is associated with a more 'left' side of politics, though all types of governments have created and implemented climate change management policies such as recycling or banning the use of plastic bags for shopping.

In Australia, the organisation the CSIRO responded to the reasons for the fierce bushfires, especially weather and vegetation issues. They also released on their website a statement about the role of climate change (CSIRO, n.d.):

Climate change doesn't cause fires directly but has caused an increase in the occurrence of extreme fire weather and in the length of the fire season across large parts of Australia since the 1950s. In addition to 2019 being the driest year since records began in 1900, it was Australia's warmest year. In 2019 the annual mean temperature was 1.52 °C above average.

The impact of climate change has led to longer, more intense fire seasons and an increase in the average number of elevated fire weather days, as measured by the Forest Fire Danger Index (FFDI). Last year saw the highest annual accumulated FFDI on record.

These comments would be regarded as factual scientific statements. However, on social media, the emphasis for this problem was on blaming someone. The targets of the fake news were arsonists, members of green political parties and other political parties. Figure 103 is fake in so much as being the type of news where a story will be created to cause aggressive online arguments. Additionally, misinformation about bush fire causes and what was occurring during the fire disaster occurred. Nasya Bahfen (2020) was especially critical of Facebook and other social media for not acting quickly enough to sort facts from fake stories:

Away from such newsrooms, and as the worst bushfire season in recent memory was decimating parts of Australia, social media was doing what it usually does during a natural disaster.

At best, it exaggerated false or misleading information.

At worst, it actively engaged in campaigns of misinformation.

For instance, a three-dimensional visualisation of the fires (based on satellite data) by Australian artist Anthony Hearsey was taken for an official NASA image by, among others, US entertainer Rihanna who shared the image to her ninety-five million Twitter followers.

“So what?” might be a natural response to this seemingly innocent mistake – and it would be a fair one.

You could argue that such an example of “fake news” is relatively harmless, unlike several misinformation campaigns by bots which have variously tried to credit an arson epidemic, the Islamic State, Chinese property developers, or the need for high speed rail down Australia's east coast as the culprits behind the 2019-2020 fire season.

We can and should mock the ludicrous, fact-free nature of such conspiracy theories.

Whilst not exonerating the crime of arson, the problem of fake news about these bushfires was stating that arson alone caused the bushfires. But as Zappone (2020) reported why this

fake news was concerning because, like Bahfen (2020), argued the information encouraged right-wing conspiracy theory development, a key strategy to convincing readers of something that is not proven by facts yet is believed:

The accounts promoted the idea that arson was the sole driver of the bushfires.

“We found many accounts using #ArsonEmergency were behaving ‘suspiciously’ compared to those using #AustraliaFire and #BushfireAustralia,” wrote QUT’s Timothy Graham and Tobias R. Keller.

“Accounts peddling #ArsonEmergency carried out activity similar to what we’ve witnessed in past disinformation campaigns, such as the co-ordinated behaviour of Russian trolls during the 2016 US presidential election.”

While misinformation is inaccurate information spread through error and confusion, disinformation is false information spread on purpose.

The scale of the bushfire tweets didn't necessarily suggest they were part of a broad co-ordinated plan by any group but more likely the work of informal networks of partisans. As the Australian Strategic Policy Institute's Elise Thomas wrote later: “... Australia’s bushfire crisis - like other crises, including the burning of the Amazon rainforest in 2019 - has been sucked into multiple overlapping fringe right-wing and conspiracy narratives, which are generating and amplifying disinformation in support of their own political and ideological positions.”

It was also the online image manipulation of people, wildlife, emergency workers and burnt landscapes that became used as a strategy to gain money from the public. During and after the fires, millions of dollars were raised. Fake news with images containing links to false charities quickly appeared. Bolger (2020) reported the problem as:

Some manipulated images have been used to illicit funds from unsuspecting people wanting to help victims of the fires.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission has warned about a number of appeals raising funds for people and animals affected by the bushfires are scams.

“Scammers are cold-calling, direct messaging and creating fake websites and pages on social media to raise funds,” an ACCC<sup>18</sup> statement said.

Media outlets have also contributed to the promotion of misinformation.

This illustrates the potential dangers to people who believe fake news, as it is natural to want to help by donating money to bush fire charities, but some people lost money due to the convincing nature of the fake news content.

These six examples illustrate the type of fake news that exists on Facebook. It cannot be easily dismissed as harmless.

## Why Fake News is a Detriment to Society and the Individual?

Despite arguments that fake news is easy to ignore, research and opinion states it can have various negative effects on a society, a democracy and the individual. As stated previously, scholars still argue and debate its definition. Despite this, the agreement that fake news poses a type of existential and real threat to democracy has been consistently argued in research (Higdon, 2020, p. 4). What evidence researchers in academia, government and news mass media organisations look for is what makes fake news a threat and how is it threatening to a society? Facebook, and other social media platforms, do consider fake news a serious issue, attempting to keep it off their platforms. What are found across studies are various reasons why they are detrimental to society and individuals and urge for its removal.

Research findings can influence Facebook's and others' decisions to see fake news as harmful and draw on them to create policies to stop them. Industry and governments have put in place policies and penalties for fake news production (Higdon, 2020; Goldberg, 2017), though Facebook needed scandals like Russian trolls' content posting and Cambridge Analytica to take serious and consistent action against it. As Ramos (2020, p. 7) states, it has destroyed political reputations, tipped elections in countries around the world, and was critical in Brexit, Trump and countless other elections.

A term that many researchers have applied to fake news is that it is an epistemological threat or crisis. This term means acquiring knowledge and understanding with account, argument and reason (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2020). To clarify in relation to mass media news, an article should give knowledge and understanding of an event or report that is reasonable and can be argued over as a respectful debate. As a verb the act of epistemology explains human minds relation to reality and perception of it that news can filter. Further, it is needed in order to distinguish between the truth and falsehood as we obtain knowledge from the world around us (Thaxton & Danahy, 2020). Fake news blurs and distorts the process of debate as we are drawn to believe things that are not facts or truth, but suit our own worldview. Ramos (2020, p. 8) argues this is a significant reason for the discord that is rife on social media and the Internet:

Today we see an epistemological fracturing, a rupture of a public sphere. We see the stoking of ethnic hatred and the fracturing of a common sense of humanity. We see social polarisation across the political spectrum typified by an internet mediated shouting match between worldviews and ideologies rather than dialog. We also see a flight from expertise, science and the development and uptake of pseudo scientific "theories", in particular at a time when scientific understanding (climate science) is critical to human survival.

Other researchers warn that is an epistemological threat to all but especially American democracy (Higdon, 2020, p. 2; Broniatowski, Jamison & Qi, 2018; Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Sho et al. 2017). For example, it was believed the bushfires would not have occurred had hazard reduction burning happened. People may believe this as an irrefutable fact and vote in politicians that will stop such burning practices. If fake news is consistently published, such a scenario to believe what is not factual is possible. Such consistency of publishing can also be aided by automated chat bots that create fake news as repetitive tasks without humans needing to constantly program them.

What is speculated is that fake news also serves to demonise groups of people, cultures or races for political or other ends. As the Hilary Clinton fake divorce proceedings and assertions made that Donald Trump's family have links to the KKK illustrated, fake news stories can be made up that fabricate involvement in activities that were not proven to be true. This is another reason why fake news has become something sinister. An example of such fabrication used in a fake discriminatory manner was reported by Tandoc, Lim and Ling (2017, p. 7) where right-wing news site Breitbart reported that retailer Target's share prices had dropped because of its transgender policies, but that was an unlikely cause of its poor financial performance. Such fake news stories like the one appearing on Breitbart that speculate without fact are common on Facebook.

Table 10 illustrates from various types of research studies<sup>19</sup> the problems fake news cause and how researchers view fake news as threats to society and individuals:

Table 10  
*Research findings of fake news studies*

<b>Researchers and Publication Year</b>	<b>Findings</b>
Figueira & Oliveira (2017)	Although fake news is harmful to society, the use of algorithms to detect it and prevent more creation of it can collide with democratic values like freedom of speech, but such technology can also minimise societal and individual harms.
Tan & Ang (2017)	Fake news spreading is fast supported by social media and search algorithms that control what users read that people, by the algorithm, are wanting to see, in turn building confirmation bias in humans.
Kristiansen & Kaussler, (2018)	News personalities have been proven to spread fake news on their television shows, such as Fox News in the United States.
Zannettou, Sirivianos, Blackburn & Kourtellis (2018)	False-information campaigns can have dire consequences to the public: mutating their opinions and actions, especially with respect to critical world events like major elections.
Vamanu (2019)	Fake news stories on illegal immigrants often seek to persuade citizens to support deportation of illegal immigrants and vote against pro-immigration politicians, but, the critical thinker should raise questions about the appropriateness of recommended courses of action.
Carlson (2020)	While social media drive the sharing of fake news stories, the monetization of this sharing occurs through the economics of attention that dominate digital media. The online advertising model rewards visits, albeit at a rate that requires volume to be profitable. These conditions are faulted for driving a deluge of clickbait content designed to attracting clicks, with fake news held up as the more insidious outcome (Carlson, 2020, p. 383).

Fedeli (2020)	After an attack on a Polish tourist, fake news spread as on-line debates spurred by diverging versions of the truth and politicised propaganda divulged by on-line sources caused a collective negative effect for Egypt's image, resulting in travel cancellations to the country by Polish travellers (Fedeli, 2020, p. 2).
Iosifidis & Nicoli (2020)	A large number of fake Facebook pages and accounts acting as sources of disinformation are suspected of having ties with Russian and Iranian entities and come with specific agendas therefore creating a form of 'information warfare' through Facebook (Iosifidis & Nicoli, 2020, p. 66).
Tenove (2020)	Treating disinformation as a national security threat often makes sense. Disinformation tactics could undermine a people's capacity to enact its decisions via their democratic government (such as by fabricating orders from public officials), or compromise a people's ability to contribute to rule making (such as by circulating news of a natural disaster on a voting day) (Tenove, 2020, p. 8).
Wasserman (2020)	The threat that 'fake news' has been said to hold for South Africa was not only directed at journalism as such but also against the democratic values of truth telling, participation and informed decision-making in the public sphere (Wasserman, 2020, p. 12).

These studies illustrate the potential that has been found for fake news to cause widespread damage to society. Lawmakers and governments throughout the world do take this as a serious issue. As a final example of large groups of people being fooled by fake news, Ireton and Posetti (2018) of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reported on how people on social media tracked the progress of a trapped schoolgirl's rescue in the 2017 Mexican earthquake. This was found to be untrue and no schoolgirl existed who was trapped in rubble. The sense of betrayal felt by readers following the schoolgirl's progress was voiced loudly on social media.

### **How Does Facebook Manage Fake (or False) News?**

Facebook eventually recognised that fake news was a problem for the platform and responded to pressure to manage it. In 2017, Facebook Security released a public report called *Information Operations and Facebook* that addressed the fake news issue. The information presented in this section draws on this, Facebook's other official websites and academic research.

The key difference Facebook employs on this issue reflects other previously mentioned criticisms of the term 'fake news' being an overused term. Facebook calls fake news 'false news' definite it as (Weedon, Nuland & Stamos, 2017, p. 5) "News articles that purport to be

factual, but which contain intentional misstatements of fact with the intention to arouse passions, attract viewership, or deceive”.

Facebook has provided how to do recognise false news. The problem though again references back to a solid agreed definition of fake news. This is important because although, as the six examples in this section displayed, some news can be seen as immediately false whilst some cannot. The suggestion is what is fake news needs further criteria to judge it as such as Gelfert (2018, p. 99) suggests:

Any such attempt to reduce the phenomenon of fake news to just any sort of disconnect from reality is problematic. Defining fake news as “news that contains false or inaccurate information” is inadequate, given that even high-quality news sources will make the occasional mistake - yet an honest mistake regarding some irrelevant detail does not render the bulk of the reporting fake news. Facebook’s definition of ‘fake news’ as “false news” is hardly any better. To be sure, it does not equate false news with reports that are false *simpliciter*, but only with reports that are intentionally false, but this would include simple one-off lies as well as, perhaps more problematically, minor falsehoods that are the inevitable result of legitimate attempts to simplify complex matters in a way that makes them more accessible.

Though this concern is important, with Facebook being under much pressure to address false news a framework needed to be developed to identify and classify such content. Fact checking websites have also become more widely used to assist in this process of fake news identification.

In the 2017 report, there were four strategies Facebook would do about false news (Weedon, Nuland & Stamos, 2017, p. 5):

1. Collaborating with others to find industry solutions to this societal problem
2. Disrupting economic incentives, to undermine operations that are financially motivated
3. Building new products to curb the spread of false news and improve information diversity
4. Helping people make more informed decisions when they encounter false news

What Facebook found were three features of online information that those (including those who build automated bots) who attempted to post false news would do: do a targeted data collection, create content often by fake profiles and falsely amplify content to intentionally manipulate political discussions (Weedon, Nuland & Stamos, 2017, p. 6). The report goes into much detail of these three features. Facebook also has been updating users on the success of stopping false news.

Facebook published ten tips that practically assist the Facebook user to recognise false news. The aim is to disrupt the economic incentives such as fake news scams for people sharing



misinformation. These tips given to users to assist with identifying false news on Facebook are (Facebook Help Centre, 2020):

1. Be skeptical of headlines. False news stories often have catchy headlines in all caps with exclamation points. If shocking claims in the headline sound unbelievable, they probably are.
2. Look closely at the link. A phony or look-alike link may be a warning sign of false news. Many false news sites mimic authentic news sources by making small changes to the link. You can go to the site to compare the link to established sources.
3. Investigate the source. Ensure that the story is written by a source that you trust with a reputation for accuracy. If the story comes from an unfamiliar organization, check their “About” section to learn more.
4. Watch for unusual formatting. Many false news sites have misspellings or awkward layouts. Read carefully if you see these signs.
5. Consider the photos. False news stories often contain manipulated images or videos. Sometimes the photo may be authentic, but taken out of context. You can search for the photo or image to verify where it came from.
6. Inspect the dates. False news stories may contain timelines that make no sense, or event dates that have been altered.
7. Check the evidence. Check the author's sources to confirm that they are accurate. Lack of evidence or reliance on unnamed experts may indicate a false news story.
8. Look at other reports. If no other news source is reporting the same story, it may indicate that the story is false. If the story is reported by multiple sources you trust, it's more likely to be true.
9. Is the story a joke? Sometimes false news stories can be hard to distinguish from humor or satire. Check whether the source is known for parody, and whether the story's details and tone suggest it may be just for fun.
10. Some stories are intentionally false. Think critically about the stories you read, and only share news that you know to be credible.

Judging these as effective is difficult because it is not known how many users would report false news. Yet two studies demonstrated that Facebook users do identify and report false news and reduce sharing the content (Mena, 2020; Pennycook, Cannon & Rand, 2018):

In this context, this study found that the flagging of false news had a significant effect on reducing false news sharing intentions. The study showed that respondents who saw a fabricated Facebook post with a warning label had lower intentions to share that content than those who did not see the flag. This is consistent with findings of previous research.

Assessing Facebook's response to false news, it has been reasonably and swiftly addressed. To prevent future controversies Facebook has a vested interest in identifying and removing fake news content. It will likely continue to improve its policies and processes to make sure this continues.

### **Fact Checking Websites**

To manage fake news and alert the public to it, websites have emerged that check details of stories for accuracy and fact. These fact-checking services are usually organisations that analyse and determine the accuracy of claims and content in the public domain and guide users on the credibility of online content (Brandtzaeg, Følstad & Domínguez (2018)).

Examples of fact checking websites include:

RMIT ABC Fact Check

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/factcheck/>

Snopes.com

<https://www.snopes.com/>

The Washington Post Face Check

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/>

Open Secrets.com

<https://www.opensecrets.org/>

FactCheck.org

<https://www.factcheck.org/>

Pollitifact

<https://www.politifact.com/>

Snopes is considered at the time of writing in 2020 a fairly accurate site to consult and has developed a reputation for being a 'go to' site for journalists and the public.

### **Chapter Summary and Conclusions**

This chapter examined three controversies Facebook experienced that eroded user trust in the social media platform. Algorithms are now part of our digital lives, but Facebook's News Feed gave users content they did not want to see. The second controversy was Facebook's most damaging to its reputation to date being its involvement with Cambridge Analytica. It was seen by Facebook users as a betrayal of trust and brought the possibility of outside forces interfering in the democratic operations of a country. Finally, fake news was discussed and how it too has been an issue for Facebook that took much effort and feedback from users to get the platform to address it. Fake news spreads misinformation, rumour, gossip and scams relentlessly. All three controversies will be analysed for some time to come to prevent, or attempt to manage them, from reoccurring.

Chapter Six takes a substantive examination of what affects the individual Facebook user; protection of one's reputation on the platform.

## Notes

- 1 Quote from Ashif Shereef (2018) from The Start Up website.
- 2 Quote from Kurt Wagner (2018) from Vox Website.
- 3 Quote from Bruce Schneier (2019) from his website Schneier on Security.
- 4 As at June 2002, the full Mark Zuckerberg Facebook message discussing this issue is a public post accessible by anyone and located at <https://www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/10104413015393571#>
- 5 Adam Mosseri's full explanation of the News Feed algorithm can be found at <https://about.fb.com/news/2018/01/news-feed-fyi-bringing-people-closer-together/>
- 6 This image of Nix is credited to Nic Fildes and the Financial Times website, but the photo is credited by Financial Times to Bryan Bedder in 2016, Getty Images for Concordia Summit.
- 7 For a description of Alexander Nix see Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander\\_Nix](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Nix)
- 8 Many sources were consulted and compared to verify the events discussed in this section. There are many books, videos and websites on Cambridge Analytica that discuss what happened. Below is a sample of these formats that may assist in understanding the data breach scandal:

### Books:

Whistleblower Christopher Wiley (2019) wrote his view about his role in the scandal in his book *Mind\*uck: Inside Cambridge Analytica's Plot to Break the World*.

Business consultant and former director at Cambridge Analytica Brittany Kaiser (2019) also wrote a memoir similar to Wiley called *Targeted: My Inside Story of Cambridge Analytica and How Trump and Facebook Broke Democracy*.

### Film and Video:

Karim Amer and Jehane Noujaim's (2019) Netflix streaming service documentary that concentrated on an investigation by journalist Carole Cadwalladr of The Observer and The Guardian news sites. A synopsis of the documentary can be found at Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Great\\_Hack](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Great_Hack)

Casey Newton (2018) explains in 6 minutes and 16 seconds very well the specifics of the scandal at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDR8qGmyEQg>

**Web Sites:**

Yadav (2019) wrote a concise chronological history of the scandal on the Tech 2 news site at:

<https://www.firstpost.com/tech/news-analysis/cambridge-analytica-data-scandal-timeline-of-year-gone-by-shows-facebook-has-a-lot-to-do-6281611.html>

Wikipedia entry of the scandal is at

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook%E2%80%93Cambridge\\_Analytica\\_data\\_scandal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook%E2%80%93Cambridge_Analytica_data_scandal)

- 9 Data mining is used for many reasons, but commercial reasons are often a reason for using it. It became a much-used term in the 1990's and has had its controversies around collecting and using data without consent. A business definition is (SAS, 2020):

Data mining is the process of finding anomalies, patterns and correlations within large data sets to predict outcomes. Using a broad range of techniques, you can use this information to increase revenues, cut costs, improve customer relationships, reduce risks and more.

- 10 A definition of the term culture wars is given by the website Social Science Libre Texts (2020) as being:

In American usage, "culture war" refers to the claim that there is a conflict between those conservative and liberal values.

As well as from the same website:

James Davison Hunter argued that on an increasing number of "hot-button" defining issues, such as abortion, gun politics, separation of church and state, privacy, recreational drug use, homosexuality, and censorship issues, there existed two definable polarities.

- 11 Digman's paper as at June 2020 is available at <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev.ps.41.020190.002221>. It should be noted that the Five Factors and OCEAN models have been criticised for their lack of theory and its simplicity. However, OCEAN was the methodology used by Cambridge Analytica in their user voting profile activities and microtargeting.
- 12 Consult Christopher Wylie's Wikipedia page for information on this life and involvement with Cambridge Analytica at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher\\_Wylie](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher_Wylie)
- 13 Racialise in this context of the data breach scandal means placing an emphasis on race or racial considerations, as in determining policy or interpreting events (The Free Dictionary, n.d.).

- 14 Brittany Kaiser from website Brainy Quote (2020).
- 15 Christopher Wylie from website Quotes.net (2020).
- 16 Clipart in this figure is royalty free and does not need referencing.
- 17 Pizzagate turned out to be known as a conspiracy theory. As reported in my second book (Nycyk, 2017, p. 136-137), the following was reported about the fake scandal:

The Pizzagate fake news incident that is complex and involves many on and offline organisations and Internet sites, especially 4chan and Reddit. Two simple descriptions of it are from first, Know Your Meme (2017):

Pizzagate is a conspiracy theory regarding a series of emails hacked from former Hillary Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta's account, which some supporters of Donald Trump claimed were coded messages discussing an underground pedophile ring operated at the Comet Ping Pong Pizza restaurant in Washington, D.C.

The second is from Esquire (Sebastian, 2016):

It all started in early November, when Clinton campaign manager John Podesta's email was hacked and the messages were published by Wikileaks. One of the emails, according to The New York Times, was between Podesta and James Alefantis, the owner of D.C.'s Comet Ping Pong. The message discussed Alefantis hosting a possible fundraiser for Clinton.

Users of the website 4Chan began speculating about the links between Comet Ping Pong and the Democratic Party, according to the BBC, with one particularly vile connection burbling to the surface: the pizzeria is the headquarters of a child trafficking ring led by Clinton and Podesta.

- 18 ACCC stands for Australian Competition and Consumer Commission.
- 19 Some of the studies listed in the table appear in other studies but were searched for through the academic databases and Google Scholar. However, Higdon's (2020) article did assist with finding studies, so some references in the table do appear in Higdon's article. It is acknowledged the table does use the ideas of Higdon, so is therefore part of the collected studies that Higdon is included as a source in compiling the issues of fake news.

# CHAPTER SIX

## POTENTIAL EFFECTS ON EMPLOYMENT, RELATIONSHIPS AND REPUTATIONS: AN ETHICAL ISSUE FOR FACEBOOK USERS

“Well, let me give you some very practical tips. First of all, I want everybody here to be careful about what you post on Facebook, because in the YouTube age, whatever you do, it will be pulled up again later somewhere in your life,” Obama said. - Former United States of America President Barack Obama<sup>1</sup>

**Employer:** Please send resume and link to Facebook

**Interviewee:** Do you want me to send you a link to my Facebook?

**Employer:** Yes please

**Interviewee:** Sorry I like to keep my personal life private and between friends/family. All the best in your search. Thanks.

**Employer:** You would not want a stranger in your home looking after your kids unless you checked them out right? - Williams (2017)<sup>2</sup>

There are several concerns when examining an applicant’s social media. For starters, you can’t un-see an applicant’s social media information. This could lead to problems with inherent bias and could be used against an employer during litigation. There have already been numerous lawsuits alleging bias when an employer used social-media profiles to screen potential applicants. - Burkes (2019)<sup>3</sup>

This chapter discusses the potential effects Facebook content can have on the user’s reputation when what is posted is broadcast to millions of other users. For this chapter the word ‘reputation’ is drawn from the website Vocabulary.com. (n.d.) as the following:

Your reputation is the general belief or opinion that other people have about you. If you are considered trustworthy and kind, you have a good reputation.

Reputation comes from the Latin word reputationem, which means “consideration.” It’s how people consider, or label, you - good or bad.

Therefore, it is a belief another has about you which manifests as an opinion. Each person decides in their mind what your reputation is. Brands, businesses and governments as well have reputations, but for this chapter the emphasis is on the human personal reputation.

Posting on Facebook has had consequences for users through their own posts or posts about them from friends and others. These include: loss of relationships, spread of false or true rumours about one’s character, loss of employment and income, as well as ending up in law

courts for defamation and being filmed or self-filming undertaking crimes that are used in evidence in prosecution.

Why this is an ethical issue for users lies in the assumed belief that Facebook is a private space even if their posts are set to public. This clashes with a belief that ever since Facebook became open to all there is a right for people to see even private account contents and judge a person as being fit to be employed by an organisation. In some professions such as the police, defence force or intelligence agencies, the user may have no choice but to show their Facebook content to them so they can be employed.

How a user's reputation is presented on Facebook is an important issue to consider. People do believe it is a place to post what is wanted and that, even if a country does not have freedom of speech provisions in its nation's constitutions, they have the right to say what they wish. As the other chapters have shown, this can be to the detriment of the person or organisation. Yet concurrently, people may not be concerned about what a user posts, such as appearing drunk in a photo or posting potentially defamatory comments. Such posted content does not mean a person will not obtain the job they apply for. However, the issue of reputation on Facebook, especially in terms of finding a job is important to be aware of as what appears on Facebook has been proven to cause people to miss out on jobs or be terminated from their employment.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the theories and ideas behind reputation and why they matter. This is followed by examples of Facebook posts that have gotten people fired from jobs illustrating how posted content did this. A discussion of legal cases where employees have taken action in a commission or a court against their employers for their firing as a result of Facebook posts is given with four cases illustrating this growing issue. A 2015 study I conducted about consequences on reputation and identity is included that shows what types of gossip and rumour posts on Facebook can affect a user's reputation.

## Why Reputation on Facebook Matters?

In William Shakespeare's play *Othello*, there is an exchange between the villain Iago and one of the characters he is using to destroy Othello, Cassio. In Act 2 Scene 3, Cassio, a soldier, had been in a physical altercation and is visibly upset that his reputation, which he values highly, has been tarnished because of it. However, in a manner that shows not everyone will judge you on reputation, Iago dismisses reputation as the "be all" of a person, showing a contradiction that exists even today (Shakespeare Online, 2020):

Cassio:

Reputation, reputation, reputation! Oh, I have lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial. My reputation, Iago, my reputation!

Iago:

As I am an honest man, I thought you had received some bodily wound. There is more sense in that than in reputation. Reputation is an idle and most false imposition, oft got without merit and lost without deserving. You have lost no reputation at all unless you repute yourself such a loser.

Milinski (2016) argues that reputation is a universal currency which can be used in any social situation for gain. Although every single life situation is different, hence why people have mixed views of another's reputation, the potential for one's reputation to work for or against the person is a powerful determinant of one's behaviours. An obvious example is in an organisation you may cultivate a reputation of being reliable, hence why you may get a promotion. But your reputation with co-workers may be one of derision, of being someone who 'crawls to' or 'backside kisses' the boss to get where you are. Nevertheless, if your reputation is seen as good in any life situation, it is likely people will consider you first for much of life's opportunities.

Reputation has been studied in academia and corporations. Any organisation has a vested interest to keep their brand's reputation strong and trustworthy. In terms of human reputation, it may fluctuate in a lifetime according to what people do, but some people may thrive on having a bad reputation. A commonly used framework to explain human reputation and its management is that of Canadian-American sociologist Erving Goffman in his 1956 book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Although a full account of his book is beyond the scope of this chapter, some discussion of his ideas applies to Facebook reputation. This is the value of his work because although it was written before the Internet became a public system, researchers have applied his ideas to many online situations.

His book used the metaphor of humans constructing a performance to show the world their image, usually in a favourable way. Using various sources, including his book, some of Goffman's ideas that are like an acting performance are (Crossman, 2019; Cultural Reader, 2017; Thompson, 2016; Hogan, 2010; Goffman, 1956):

Goffman theorises that when people interact together in any social setting, including now the Internet and social media, they constantly engage in impression management. This means the person attempts to present themselves and also behave in ways that avoid and prevent being embarrassed and embarrassing others. This is naturally determined by context and that each person knows what to expect from each other with their behaviour, called by Goffman the definition of the situation.

The person coming into contact with others will attempt to control the other person or people, and guide the impression that others make of them by changing their appearance or manner. This also means they will fix or re-enforce a certain image hence why you may see the same types of content and presentation of a person on Facebook such as a celebrity.

The person being presented to will perceive the performance of the person in an often uncontrollable way, which determines not only how a reputation is viewed but influences the person to make a decision to interact with that person further or at all. All participants in the interaction create what Goffman calls a "Modus Vivendi" of positions and roles which does not always express true agreement but rather the calculation of needs and abilities within the situation.

An interesting technical description of the process of the person doing impression management to control another's view of them is described by Goffman as a form of acting to protect one's reputation. Goffman did not specifically mention reputation in this quote, but he acknowledges that 'destructive information' is something that must be stringently avoided in the presence of another Goffman (1956, p. 87):



Given the fragility and the required expressive coherence of the reality that is dramatized by a performance, there are usually facts which, if attention is drawn to them during the performance, would discredit, disrupt, or make useless the impression that the performance fosters. These facts may be said to provide 'destructive information.' A basic problem for many performances, then, is that of information control; the audience must not acquire destructive information about the situation that is being defined for them. In other words, a team must be able to keep its secrets and have its secrets kept.

Goffman's view while operating in the physical world may operate less so in the online world, especially on social media, but his ideas have been used in studies to show that acting online to craft a positive reputation does occur. As seen in other chapters, many examples of rude, abusive, offensive and trolling content with or without using real Facebook user names exists. When applying Goffman's ideas to reputation and finding work, it may seem that many Facebook users do not worry about impression management on social media.

This is why online reputation matters and why it is wise to balance being mindful of what one posts on Facebook with the right to, within Facebook guidelines, post content you wish to. While it is not suggested to always project a false image to Facebook friends, being associated with any types of posts employers may disapprove of and deleting them is important to consider. Destructive information is subjective, but if someone put on their public Facebook profile they had just been released from jail, then there is the possibility this may prevent their being hired for a job. Additionally, removing information that may be potentially damaging to an employer is not censorship but functions as crafting an identity or a claiming a stake of some power and control over what people think of us (Bechar-Israeli, 1995). Employers will then not necessarily reject a job candidate's application if the Facebook profile is presented well.

## **Employment and Facebook Reputation**

Research conducted by academic and corporate organisations has claimed that employers use social media frequently to check the suitability of job candidates to fit into their organisations. Although the validity of some surveys can be questioned, one conducted by PR Newswire<sup>4</sup> (2018) stated that those hiring candidates rejected 57 percent of those applying due to various types of content they found on the person's social media sites. Although it listed several reasons, the highest over 30 percent for rejection were (PR Newswire, 2018):

- Job candidate posted provocative or inappropriate photographs, videos or information: 40 percent
- Job candidate posted information about them drinking or using drugs: 36 percent
- Job candidate had discriminatory comments related to race, gender, religion, etc.: 31 percent
- Job candidate was linked to criminal behavior: 30 percent

Although issues such as lying about qualifications or denigrating their previous places of employment were factors, employers in this survey felt the presentation of a person in certain poses or undertaking something inappropriate to be a reason for not hiring. This brings into question though many factors that make this a complex issue. For example, if the person made a comment about a particular country and the employer had dealings with that country in any way, it may be wise to not hire that person who made the comments. Yet if a person was a criminal but the crime was considered petty and the person had been in jail or paid for their crime monetarily, the employer may not consider that to be an issue, feeling the person might have reformed.

A case study published in 2007 by Diane Coutu (2007) demonstrated the dilemma of an employer wanting to hire someone but seeing something controversial or inappropriate on social media about the candidate. Mimi wanted to work at a fashion business. They decided to open in Shanghai, China. The boss, Fred, felt Mimi had the best qualifications and cultural fit<sup>5</sup> but Virginia, the company's Human Resources Vice President found online information about Mimi (Coutu, 2007):

It was Virginia's practice to scan the first 11 pages of Google results, and on page nine she glimpsed something that might cause concern. A story in the November 1999 issue of the *Alternative Review* identified Mimi, fresh out of Berkeley, as the leader of a nonviolent but vocal protest group that had helped mobilize campaigns against the World Trade Organization.

"That's odd," Virginia mused, deciding to key in "human rights" and "free trade" along with Mimi's name. She didn't expect to find much, but the search engine came up with several hits. It was soon clear that Mimi's involvement had been more than just a student's expression of defiance. One newspaper story featured a photo of Mimi sitting outside China's San Francisco consulate protesting China's treatment of a dissident journalist.

Coutu argues that Mimi should be given the opportunity to discuss this issue with Fred. He wanted to give Mimi the job despite Virginia's reservations after seeing online content about her. Internet scholar boyd (2007) argued in response to Coutu that it was a generational issue, in that younger people were more comfortable with online information posted about them. As she states (boyd, 2007), the way the company needs to manage the situation with Mimi is:

Employers need people who play by the rules, but they also need "creatives." Mimi is a creative, and for the job Fred is trying to fill, a traditionalist just won't do. Fred should listen to his own instincts and hire Mimi. I'd advise him to open a conversation with her immediately so that they can strategize together about how to handle potential challenges posed by employees' online practices.

I think Fred will learn a lot from that experience. My generation isn't as afraid of public opinion as his was. We face it head-on and know how to manage it. We digitally document every love story and teen drama imaginable and then go on to put out content that creates a really nuanced public persona. If you read just one entry, you're bound to get a distorted view. That's why I would also advise Mimi to begin creating her own Google trails. She should express her current thoughts on China, reflecting on how she has fine-tuned her perspective over the years.

Part of living in a networked society is learning how to accessorize our digital bodies, just as we learn to put on the appropriate clothes to go to the office.

What is evident from this case is that perhaps a degree of flexibility and finding out facts from the potential employee may be a strategy to employ. The organisation risks losing a person with skills, knowledge and networks based on an online image or post of a person that is now out of date or the person has changed their attitude or beliefs.

Employers and human resource departments are adamant that they have a right to view people's private social media content. There are various laws across the world that do prevent or limit this practice. But comments such as these suggest social media viewing is a right for an employer to conduct (Driver, 2020):

"It's the recruiting world we live in now," Matt Lanier, a corporate recruiter at Eliassen Group, a Massachusetts staffing agency, told The Huffington Post. "If the candidates are willing to publicly post something on social media, a potential employer has every right to factor it in when considering you for a job (Thottam, 2020)."

"The three main platforms that most employers check are LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter," said Matt Erhard, senior partner at Summit Search Group. "I am personally most interested in the candidate's LinkedIn profile, as it's the most relevant."

Most employers view LinkedIn as a secondary resume and other social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram as more personal.

"When I check a candidate's Facebook or Twitter, my aim is more to get a sense of them as a person than to look for damaging information," Erhard told Business News Daily.

There may be many reasons why the employer considers it important to check someone's social media and online presence. Some examples are:

- Protecting the company's brand
- Fit in with the culture, which although an individual and subjective view the employer holds, is considered a vital skill to have for team and client relationships
- Make sure they have not committed corporate or other crimes such as embezzlement
- Make sure they can work alongside people who are culturally or linguistically diverse
- That they will keep the company's operations and information confidential
- They will not place the company in a position where legal action will be taken against them, although the practice of whistle-blowing, of posting information on their illegal activities or criticisms of the company is often welcomed and frequently practiced on social media

- Working for highly specialised occupations such as intelligence agency work, police and detective positions, various health service positions, a teacher or a foreign diplomat

By contrast, there is a belief that one's Internet presence especially social media is private. Much information is public on the World Wide Web, but it has been the judgements of employers who use Facebook and other platforms to make a hiring decision that have attracted controversies. In 2009 when I was studying at Curtin University in Perth, Australia, one of the topics in the first-year unit was debating if employers should hire or not based on social media content. In this extract from a private assignment I disagreed with another student in an online tutorial who was an employer. They were insistent that decisions to hire must be made on social media. This caused a lively debate as this extract<sup>6</sup> illustrates (Nycyk, 2009):

The case of Mimi being seen protesting against China (Coutu, 2007; boyd 2007) in the past and now wanting to work for a company in Shanghai raised many issues of being haunted by past internet footprints. It also highlighted a large dilemma of the current internet age. At what point do we judge others on their internet identities? I learned a major lesson about this from a debate with other posters, some of whom seemed to take it for granted it was now part of the employment market. L presented her view which represents current thinking from a management view when she wrote:

I know I have researched potential employers online to see what their corporate values are, who they are affiliated with and who they endorse to see if they align with my personal values. Why can't employers do the same?

However, I objected and disagreed with her because I felt judging a person based on personal values from a web presence and denying them employment is wrong as my strong response indicated:

But personal values be aligned with the boss? That suggests that if on the internet you saw someone's Facebook and say they smoked and your personal values were you don't smoke but the person had 99% all the skills you need to make money for you would not hire them? ...To rely on Google for selecting people just does not seem a wise strategy to base a "we won't hire" decision on.

S offered a view that an employer would have to be very careful when hiring people that they don't discriminate against the candidate. But K admitted she had done this practice and made a decision about a candidate based on the information she saw online.

With such a polarising view on this topic, various countries have viewed the practice of being forced to hand over passwords to private social media as unlawful. For example, in the United States over 20 states have passed laws making it illegal for employers to ask applicants to hand over their usernames and passwords to their private social media accounts. Likewise, applicants cannot be forced to pull up their social media accounts during an interview or tell the employer about the contents of their social media pages (Barreiro, 2020).

Employers can also monitor employee social media use at work and outside of work hours. This is also another contentious issue. Social media policies can be drafted by organisations and governments that may not stop people creating social media accounts but they may control the content employees can post. Examples of such content include: criticising the organisation, one's boss or bosses, other employees of the company or posting confidential organisational information. In Australia, government employees may need to sign contracts controlling the content and views they can post on their social media accounts.

Organisations want to especially prevent controversial statements and content being posted on individual's Facebook accounts. This is especially if that comment is deemed to be offensive, such as racism, sexism and homophobia, as well as support for certain political parties or terrorism. A sports person or a celebrity is usually deemed an employee of a company or is accountable to some organisation, so making these types of comments can result in income and reputation loss and they can experience cancel culture as a result of such posts.

Although related more so to Facebook's other platform Instagram, one dismissal that caused international controversy and legal proceedings was that of Australian football player Israel Folau. In 2018 he was asked on his Instagram about his views on homosexuality. His post stating they were going to hell caused arguments on social media with accusations of him being homophobic. Others said he had the right to state his views. He then made further posts about homosexuality being a sin. In May 2019 a Code of Conduct hearing from Rugby Australia took place with Folau found to have breached their code. An eventual hearing and later appeal with the Fair Work Commission in Australia took place with Folau suing Rugby Australia for \$14 million Australian dollars. It was eventually settled in December 2019. What this shows is that anyone can have their employment terminated based on their social media content.

### Examples of Facebook Posts that Resulted in Employee Employment Termination

To illustrate the types of Facebook posts that cause an employee to have their employment terminated, five examples of employee Facebook posts are presented. These were obtained from public sites on the World Wide Web although some of them do have details of the person and organisation masked.

#### Example 1: Hating your boss and posting it when you are Facebook friends with them



Figure 104. Boss sees I Hate Boss Message (Awesome Inventions, n.d.)

### Example 2: Two police officers fired over threatening comment



Figure 105. Police lose jobs over Facebook Post (Frauenfelder, 2019)

### Example 3: Posting what you should not do at work and boss sees on Facebook



Figure 106. Caught by boss doing what should not be done at work (Fraser, 2020)

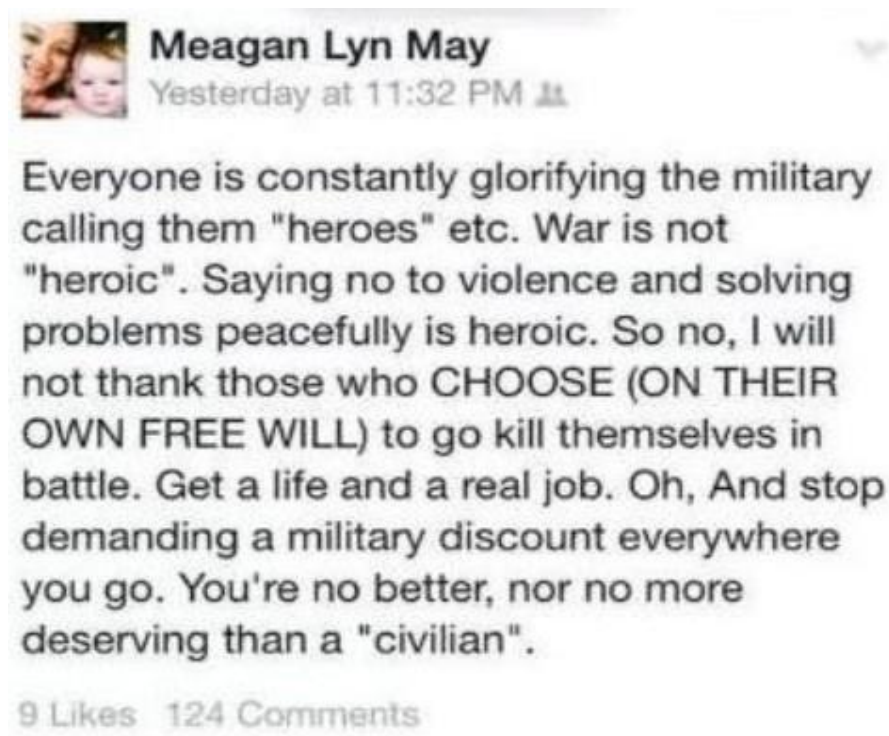
**Example 4: Criticising the military gets employee fired**

Figure 107. Opinion about the military gets one fired (Staff, 2013)

**Example 5: Academic is fired for bombing comment**

Figure 108. Academic fired for making comment about bombing American targets (India Post News Weekly, 2020)

## Reputation, Social Media and Employment: A Contentious Societal Issue

Reputation studies on the role of social media in obtaining employment and effects on one's career when in employment are a growing area of research. In the media there is constant reporting of conflicts between employers and employees over Facebook and other social media posted content. This is both when someone is employed and makes comments on social media and those who are applying for a job. The latter has been termed cybervetting, which can be offered by external technology companies where the screening undertaken is so sophisticated to find out if person can 'fit' into the company and identify any risk factors involved in hiring them (Jacobson & Gruzd, 2020).

A wide range of studies suggest that taking care of one's presentation on social media is crucial and should be taught to people in schools, colleges and universities. In their study of Australian employers' perceptions of job candidates and their seeing unprofessional social media behaviours, Sutherland, Freberg and Driver (2019, p. 113) state:

Without ethical processes, policies and procedures to underpin the practice of using social media as a tool to screen and monitor, the influence that it has on employee hiring decisions may be largely subjective resulting in an uneven playing field among all job applicants. Employers may form their decisions from their own unconscious biases relating to what they deem to be positive or negative about a candidate's online presence rather than assessing each candidate in a systematic way. This inability to secure employment as a result of employers being influenced by candidates' social media presence is a stark reality.

The problem of an employer's unconscious biases is a major concern and is uncontrollable by the job applicant. Such biases are many and are different across industries. For example, someone may post photos of them with many tattoos and may have little problem obtaining a job as a tattooist. Yet in an administrative job it could be seen having tattoos may offend the company's clients so they are not hired.

This is the main problem with employers using social media to hire candidates and monitor their workforce. A 2011 Fair Work Australia Commission hearing took place between a terminated employee and a company. The employee had posted threats against the company's management that they thought were private. The outcome was that the adjudicator upheld the dismissal saying the separation between home and work is now less pronounced than it once was (Phys.org, 2011). Public and private boundaries and how much work colleagues and management can intrude into them is a large issue. Brown and Dent (2019) reported that a tension now exists between employees, demanding privacy, against employers expecting access to the private lives of their workforce over concerns employee comments may damage the employer's reputation.

Complaints about work that were once spoken in private to another individual are thus now potentially available for millions to see (Teitel, 2012, p. 3). Privacy settings do not always give affordances of limited audiences and it is possible a work colleague can copy or take a screen shot of the content and hand it to the boss. The type of content that gets an employee fired can also be confusing especially when an organisation's social media policies are unclear. For example, in a study by Drouin, O'Connor, Schmidt and Miller (2015), they reported a bizarre termination where an English teacher on holidays in Europe was asked to resign because of a photo of her holding what appeared to be alcohol in her hand outside an



Irish pub. There can be assumptions about her reputation made from the photo, but the context was a holiday photo, so it brings into question why the organisation would ask her to resign because of it.

People, employers especially, can be accused of being shallow when making decisions based on physical appearance rather than the applicant's skills. Baert's (2018) field experiment research study in Belgium gave alarming insights into testing if a person's public Facebook photo influences selecting a job applicant for an interview or being given the job. It should be noted that even if the Facebook user has their privacy settings set to maximum privacy, if they have a profile picture it will still be able to be searched for and found. Although the study had various limitations discussed, a beneficial Facebook picture received approximately 38 percent more job interview invitations (Baert, 2018). It can be though reasonable to expect an industry may look for a particularly type of look of a person for their organisation. Examples include: fashion modelling, acting, front desk receptionists in an international hotel or luxury brand customer relations people. It may though be unreasonable to expect a high level of physical attractiveness for jobs such as construction (which can be male, female or other applying). Nevertheless, Baert's study shows how impression management when applying for jobs does play a part in candidate selection.

Researchers, often more so than employers, have been critical of these practices for hiring workers and monitoring employees. While now perhaps an unrealistic expectation because employers and human relations staff may have little time to deeply check job candidates, there are beliefs that this type of cybervetting can be unethical. Jeske and Shultz (2016, p. 542-543) state well the power that employers can use to hire workers and the contentious nature of the practices of using Facebook and other social media to do so as:

The information obtained using public as well as private social media profiles provides those with the access with the power to exercise control over others. The outcome of this approach is a potential and insidious power imbalance based on who has what information, setting the stage for potential exclusionary and even discriminatory practices in selection and recruitment as well as resistance by applicants and perceived coercion to comply.

Facebook content is not a reliable indicator of work performance. It can alert to potential issues, but as the case study by Coutu (2007) discussed where the applicant was linked to anti-Chinese activity in the past, that person may have a good work record, skills and cultural fit to perform the role. They also may have for many reasons changed their attitude towards an issue, therefore they should be given an opportunity to explain this before they are turned down for the role or have their employment terminated. Personality judgements are highly dependent on observable cues, usually in person not found online as those seen on Facebook or elsewhere can be unreliable (Jeske & Shultz, 2016; Beer & Watson, 2008).

As part of obtaining a job, the organisation should communicate to the employee social media use expectation in the workplace and outside of working hours. Resources.workable.com (2020) is a reasonable guide to balancing both the organisations and employee's rights to have social media but still protect the organisation's interests:

Your employees own their social media profiles, so what they post there can't be restricted by your organization. You can, however, provide them with reasonable guidelines about what they shouldn't post about (e.g. confidential data) and

provide any potential disciplinary actions if their posts affect your company's image (e.g. hate speech). As far as your own company's social media accounts are concerned, you're entitled to set the rules of posting.

As mentioned previously, knowledge about how social media can affect one's reputation needs to be communicated to job seekers. Some general advice is given by Hazelton and Terhorst (2015, p. 58) that can be taken into account to manage this growing situation of employers using Facebook and social media for cybervetting is:

What does this mean for students and potential job seekers? Students need to be more aware of their online presence and how their posts, shares, "likes," tweets, and other modes of communication can affect the outcome of their future with an employer. First, students should take a look at what has already been discussed on social networking sites regarding their behaviors offline. This would include looking for information posted not only by themselves but also by others about them. This will help students to understand how employers may view their behaviors or online presence through the eyes of someone else. Additionally, students need to be more informed about privacy settings and other options relating to their public profiles.

Yet increasing numbers of legal action and court cases have occurred when social media posts have violated organisational policies. These are contentious because even though ethically the public private divide and freedom of speech is still valued by Facebook and social media users, organisations will defend their public image. The rulings though do not always favour the organisation with many losing cases and having to pay the terminated employee, but also may be ordered to rehire the employee. It depends on many factors about what was posted. To illustrate this problem the next section discusses three case examples of employees taking action against organisations when they were terminated for Facebook posts.

### **Three Cases of Facebook Posts Resulting in Employee Termination and their Outcomes**

Those who are terminated from employment because of Facebook posts do have recourse in a court of law or a commission body in many countries. In this section three cases illustrate this process and consist of two Australian cases and one United States case. The results were in favour of the employee although the employers did not always rehire them even if the court or body hearing the case ruled the employee must be rehired.

#### ***Case 1 - Australian***

**Case Name:** Singh v Aerocare Flight Support Pty Ltd [2016] FWC 6186<sup>7</sup>

**Details<sup>8</sup>:**

Aerocare Flight Support was an aviation support company based in Brisbane, Australia. An employee of the company Nirmal Singh, a baggage handler in Perth, Australia, wrote in a Facebook post stating "We all support ISIS"<sup>9</sup>

The company had seen five Facebook posts but only considered the ISIS post to be in violation of company policy, conceding that was the post that caused his employment termination (Lynch Meyer, 2020). Mr Singh had shared a post from a Facebook group he was a member of called HT Australia where he added a response the ISIS support comment then

shared that post so others were able to view it.

Mr Singh had claimed the posts were sarcastic and not reflective of his personal attitude towards Australia. While the ISIS post was a serious comment that can prevent hiring of employees or termination of employment, that he worked around aircraft was seen as particularly concerning.

**Case Outcome:**

The Fair Work Commission (FWC) found in favour of Mr Singh, although he did not seek to be reinstated by the company. As stated by Austlii Fair Work Commission (2016) the finding was:

Application for relief from unfair dismissal whether breach of social media policy amounted to valid reason for dismissal no valid reason in the circumstances dismissal unfair compensation appropriate remedy reduction of compensation made for misconduct.

As a result, the FWC held that Mr Singh's dismissal was harsh, unjust and unreasonable. Mr Singh was awarded the amount of \$4,800 in compensation (8 weeks' pay), less 40% due to the ISIS Facebook Post being in breach of Aerocare's social media policy (Lynch Meyer, 2020).

What is interesting about this case was that blame was ascribed to both parties and that it was the company that did not follow correct protocols in giving Mr Singh a chance to explain about the posts. The Australian Federal Police were also involved in an investigation, but did not see any evidence of deliberate terrorist activities as a result of the posts. The reason why the dismissal was unfair was explained by law firm Clark McNamara (2017):

Commissioner Hunt ruled that even though Singh's comment was 'incredibly stupid' and constituted misconduct, a thorough internal investigation would have shown that Singh did not support ISIS and was not a threat to airport security.

Moreover, Aerocare failed to maintain procedural fairness by only taking 10 minutes to deliberate Singh's responses and not considering any alternatives to dismissal. Aerocare made the decision to dismiss Singh without giving him an opportunity to properly respond to the allegations. Singh also deleted the post and apologised for making it, which Aerocare failed to take into account.

The case indicates two issues. First, the company must communicate social media policies before hiring or give them on an employee induction course. Second, the company must investigate social media breaches thoroughly and give the employee a chance to explain the Facebook post's intent. As employers are often busy, that is used as an excuse not to conduct a thorough investigation. In turn such conduct by an employer can, and does, result in unfair dismissal claims such as Singh's.

**Case 2 - Australian**

**Case Name:** Linfox Australia Pty Ltd v Stutsel [2012] FWAFB 7097 (3 October 2012)<sup>10</sup>

**Details:**

Glen Stutsel was employed by Australian national transport company Linfox as a truck driver for 22 years. He had made racial and sexual remarks against a manager, including one calling his Muslim manager a ‘bacon hater’ (Aitken Whyte, 2016). His female manager saw the post as she was mutual friends on Facebook with one of Mr Stutsel’s Facebook friends. He further claimed the settings on his Facebook account were at maximum privacy. It turned out that his privacy settings were not as strict as his posts could be seen by various other Facebook users.

The company found the Facebook posts to be serious misconduct and offensive. His employment was terminated by letter in 2011. The hearings began in 2012 but Linfox appealed the decision which was in favour of Mr Stutsel three times, but each time the Fair Work Commission upheld its decision that Linfox had to reinstate and pay Mr Stutsel.

**Case Outcome:**

The Fair Work Commission found in favour of Mr Stutsel. As stated by Austlii Fair Work Commission (2012) the finding was:

Appeal against decision unfair dismissal serious misconduct social media  
Facebook reinstatement order to restore lost pay.

The use in the post of the term ‘bacon hater’ was not considered racial vilification against Mr Stutsel’s Muslim manager. Each time Linfox Australia appealed the original decision was upheld. Therefore, although the Facebook postings were in bad taste, offensive and inappropriate, they were not reasonable grounds for dismissal.

Once again, this case as others highlight the need for companies to have clear policies on employee social media use communicated to all in the company. The commissioner who heard the case gives a view on this issue that is important because not having such a policy increases the likelihood of unfair dismissal claims (Aitken Whyte, 2016):

At the time of Mr Stutsel’s dismissal and the time of the hearing, Linfox did not have a policy relating to the use of social media by its employees. This was highlighted by the commissioner who pointed out that while the company relied on its induction training and handbook to regulate such behaviours, in the “current electronic age, this is not sufficient”. This case demonstrates the risks associated with the use of social media by employees and the lack of regulation of this behaviour by employees, as well as the danger of terminating employment based on such conduct.

### Case 3 – The United States

**Case Name:** Michael Goza Plaintiff, v. Memphis Light, Gas and Water Division, Defendant, Case No. 2:17-cv-2873-JPM-dkv<sup>11</sup>

**Details:**

Michael Goza worked for 32 years as a customer service technician establishing an excellent employment record with the Memphis Light, Gas and Water Division. He caused public controversy when he defended in Memphis Park, Tennessee, a statue of Jefferson Davis<sup>12</sup>. After receiving criticism for doing so, Mr Goza posted on Facebook the following (Justia, 2019, p. 3-4) that caused people to examine Mr Goza's social media activity:

Lincoln himself wanted to send all of you back to Africa. Segregation? That's a whole other topic. What has it accomplished other than to cause more division between the whites and blacks. You want to be with your kind. I want to be with mine. Blacks make up 13% of the population, but yet are responsible for almost 80% of violent crime. Every city that's a third world crap whole [sic] is a majority black and ran by blacks. I could not agree more about what the federal government has done to blacks however. They're my enemy. I look at them as an enemy of Christianity. Planned Parenthood is defended by democrats mostly, but yet has murdered more blacks than all violent crime combined. I agree on the war on drugs. Its been used as an excuse to destroy our liberty while the government ships the drugs into our country and profits from it. Why else do you think that Heroin is epidemic while our troops guard the poppy fields in Afghanistan? So we may not agree on the South, but we can sure agree on the criminality of the federal government.

You want to be with your kind. I want to be with mine, There's no wrong it that. You celebrate your history, but you want to destroy mine. You have black history month, but being proud of white history is racist. That's the hypocrisy I will never be at peace with. I work the streets of Memphis daily. The real racists are blacks. 90% of the blacks who are murdered are done so at the hands of other blacks. So if black lives matter, why don't you clean up your own damn house before complaining about my history and blaming your problems on whitey.

In August 2017 these posts were brought to his Division's management's attention. They took the action of demoting him where there would be no interactions with customers, to which Mr Goza refused and had his employment terminated (Johnson, 2019).

**Case Outcome:**

A federal judge ruled in favour of Mr Goza stating that the company had violated his First Amendment rights with demoting and terminating his employment (Connolly, 2019). The company had to pay him backpay and compensation estimated at a combined total of \$190000 US Dollars. The division were concerned about customer reactions to Mr Goza being an employee, potential financial liabilities to them and Mr Goza's physical safety, hence the decision to demote him.

An extract from the case shows, like the other two cases, a failure for the company to conduct a thorough investigation into Mr Goza's Facebook posts (Justia, 2019, 17-18):

MLGW argues that several reasons motivated its decision to discipline Goza,

including potential liability, Goza's safety, public safety, and Goza's ability to perform work in or near customer homes. (ECF No. 112 at PageID 1605.) Leonard testified that she considered these factors as she made her decisions, but the Court did not find that portion of her testimony credible. (ECF No. 114 at PageID 1756-60.) Leonard testified that she chose to indefinitely suspend Goza in order to gather additional relevant information. (Testimony of Virginia Leonard, ECF No. 114 at PageID 1835.) Leonard did not, however, conduct any interviews with coworkers, supervisors or character references to assess the likelihood that Goza would discriminate against African-American customers. (Id. at PageID 1722-23.) Leonard also did not interview any customers who submitted complaints to determine whether they would boycott MLGW or would bar Goza from working in their homes.

There are further dimensions to this case, including Mr Goza's upheld claim that although 'white' he was racially discriminated against. The public vilified Mr Goza on Facebook and he became known for perceived racist views and clashing with anti-Confederate politicians and supporters. This case brings into question that what is posted on Facebook is considered a freedom and a right. As the judge who heard the case said in their judgement (Connolly, 2019)

But the judge wrote that MLGW was wrong. "The fear of 'going viral' by itself, does not appear to be a reasonable justification for a restriction on an employee's speech. To hold otherwise would permit the government to censor certain viewpoints based on the whims of the public or worse, based on a government official's speculation as to the public's eventual reaction."

These three cases demonstrate what occurs when employees are disciplined or are terminated from their employment because of Facebook posts. Although the view can be the employee should comply with an employer's social media use policies, clearly people feel they can say what they want on Facebook. The cases show that this is not so, yet the employers in all three cases did not conduct effective investigations with the employees who posted on Facebook very well at all. It was unclear if all three companies had social media policies. The cases also become public in that they are posted on the World Wide Web and are often used in the media as material for news stories. It was unclear the effect on reputation these three individuals will have, but it is permanently on record that they were involved in a court case. Employers may be weary to hire them if they know this.

However, not every case is ruled in favour of the employee. In Australia in 2011, the Fair Work Commission ruled against an employee's Facebook posts. Damian O'Keefe posted on Facebook criticisms of his management. After having his employment terminated, he lost his claim and also lost an appeal. He had criticised his organisation's pay manager, making what appeared to be a threat in the words "going down tomorrow". What was important in the ruling was the adjudicator of the case found it was a breach of company regulations, with the following comments about the case reported in Phys.org (2011) as:

O'Keefe said he was angry about not receiving his commissions and had blocked the pay manager, Kelly Taylor, from seeing his comments.

But his privacy settings meant 11 of his co-workers could read the post, and Fair Work adjudicator Deirdre Swan upheld his dismissal, finding that his actions constituted a serious breach of the company's employee regulations.

“The fact that the comments were made on the applicant's home computer, out of work hours, does not make any difference,” Swan said.

“The comments were read by work colleagues and it was not long before Ms Taylor was advised of what had occurred.”

She added the company had “rightfully submitted, in my view, that the separation between home and work is now less pronounced than it once used to be”.

Viewing these cases should be a caution to being aware that your posts can become not only visible to your employers but possibly the mass media. It is unknown what repercussions may be experienced to one's reputation by the posts and the unfair dismissal, but there will likely be more of these hearings worldwide by employees.

### **Reputation and Facebook: An Example Study**

Originally a project I began in my Masters Degree, I became interested in the effect the Internet was having on reputation. As I discussed in my first book on adult cyberbullying (Nycyk, 2015b) I had seen how cyberbullying can affect one's reputation. The gossiping and spreading of rumours often without factual basis are common on the Internet. I was interested to see if this was an area of study and if what we read on Facebook does influence our view of someone. One of my undergraduate majors was in Communication and Language, and during that part of my degree I was introduced to the idea that language has power to shape and influence peoples' responses to what happens in the world. What I have written about in this book attests to this being a real social phenomenon.

I decided to do more work on it and found a publication that would consider publishing it called *The Qualitative Report*. It was peer reviewed and accepted for publication in 2015. Since its publication I have seen examples of how reputations can be ruined by Facebook content by the user or by other Facebook users. Your Facebook posts can appear worldwide on news sites and be featured on news broadcasts. The aim of this article is to show by using examples of Facebook posts obtained from a website called *Lamebook* how language in the posts has a power to potentially shape a person's reputation and identity in a negative way. This may affect relationships or obtaining a job.

It can be argued that most of us would not care about what a person's posts on social media. We may not know that person so we can dismiss the posts as amusing or irrelevant to us. While this is true, I argue that the potential of language and its power to shape a person's reputation and identity has become a major issue in being online. Generational change may mean younger people are less inhibited to post certain types of content and future employers may not be as concerned about what the user has posted. If you are photographed drunk that may be ignored in a job application when your other work skills are considered, but language used in a post can be a powerful way to cause you to lose reputation. The study's references section appears in this chapter, but also appears in the Works Cited section at the end of this book.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) Methodology**

The article uses research methods to examine how power operates in language which is called Critical Discourse Analysis. In the article an explanation of CDA methods is given, but for clarity a definition of CDA is (van Dijk, 2001, 352):

...at type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality.



## The Power Gossip and Rumour Have in Shaping Online Identity and Reputation: A Critical Discourse Analysis

### Abstract

What is posted on the Internet about a person's identity and reputation has the potential power to affect others' perceptions of them. This study aims to understand and describe how this occurs by undertaking a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the website Lamebook. It asks in what ways people's online identity and reputation are shaped by others, or by one's self, that may influence others' opinions about them and how is this being done? The results suggest several characteristics of power relations are being exercised by people against others and themselves that harm their identity and reputation. These are achieved through gossiping and spreading rumours to persuade readers to believe harmful information about others and themselves. This study demonstrates the importance of being aware of how Internet users present themselves online and the potentially harmful consequences this has when viewed by a potentially large and unknown audience. The implications of this study advise Internet users to consider carefully potential negative outcomes to one's identity and reputation from negative information and illustrate how others possess power to shape these in a harmful way.

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Identity, Internet, Gossip, Power, Reputation, Rumours

Information posted about people on the Internet has power to shape others' views and opinions of someone with potentially negative consequences that affects perceptions of another's identity and reputation. Casual attitudes towards privacy, increasingly easy-to-use software, particularly social media sites like Facebook, and less inhibition when revealing details of one's private lives all play a role in this issue (Acquisti & Gross, 2006). The power of written texts to influence thought and opinion about someone or something has always existed in social life. The need for individuals to monitor what information appears about them on the Internet is a crucial problem for people to consider.

Power plays a crucial role in written discourse because it controls the social beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of people of any society or group (David & Dumanig, 2011; van Dijk, 1998). These can be in any documents, but particularly so on the Internet. Power is a complex strategically driven phenomenon produced through social interaction from many directions and human actors often resulting in the maintenance of inequitable social relations (Foucault, 1980, 1981). People use it in specific ways in social situations to control outcomes, and as a persuasive device through the use of language to cause the inequality and marginalisation of others.

Gossiping and spreading rumours are types of power tactics used on the Internet, particularly social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, to persuade others to believe information about themselves or others. The words used can present to the world an image not wanted. Gossip and rumour can result in stigma and shaming for people where their identity and reputation are judged negatively. Peluchette and Karl (2010) state Internet users do not appreciate the consequences of posting negative material to websites. Additionally, employers routinely use the Internet to gather character information about current and potential employees and base hiring people on this information (Clark & Roberts, 2010).

An example of how power may operate to negatively shape someone's identity or reputation is Adam Devine and his Facebook page comment. He posted an inappropriate comment about a baby (Lamebook, 2009) on his Facebook timeline leading to accusations of paedophilia, but claimed his account was hacked. This was not believed by his Facebook friends, many writing hateful comments on his page. The Loyal K.N.G. (2009) blog reproduced his Facebook page showing the negative comments he received from his friends and his full name and photograph. Such an example serves to warn us of what can happen if we do not control the information posted about us online.

This paper is a critical study of written texts using the theory and qualitative methods of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It is analytical research that studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are practised by the use of talk and text in a particular social situation (van Dijk, 2001). The purpose of CDA is to unmask power relations embedded in the text (Janks, 1998). This is why this method is called critical (Janks, 1998); the practice of writing text shapes a social structure and its beliefs and attitudes, as well as constraining something or someone (Fairclough, 1992). The Internet's content is a reflection of social and cultural practices and text and photographs can be posted online to practice abuses of power, dominance over others and inequalities.

In this paper, the types of text examined do shape the identity and reputation of someone, regardless of the audience which reads such text. That text possesses power to shape those aspects of someone is a significant problem because it impacts on one's interactions with society. What is written about you and is posted to a wide audience has the power to do that. Facebook is an excellent medium to examine this; however, obtaining text to analyse is prohibitive due to ethical concerns. I will use data from the website Lamebook ([www.lamebook.com](http://www.lamebook.com)) which reproduces Facebook postings with informant details masked. This study's contribution is to bring awareness of managing one's Internet presence. Studies in many disciplines demonstrate the consequences of this (Michelson & Mouly, 2002; Noon & Delbridge, 1993) whilst Solove (2007) warns of damage to one's identity and reputation because negative information was posted about a person on the Internet. As Gatling, Mills and Lindsay (2014) state in their CDA study, being aware of how text influences readers to make decisions about issues is important to address the inequalities in society that the written word often influences.

## **Literature Review**

The purpose of this review is to give the study a context by clarifying the four main criteria it addresses: identity, reputation, gossip and rumour.

### **Why Protect Identity and Reputation?**

A person's identity and reputation, whilst different, are sought to be shaped favourably in others' minds and fiercely protected especially when damaged. The Internet, in particular social media such as Twitter and Facebook due to their accessibility to the public despite privacy settings, can damage a person's reputation and result in social ostracism, economic disadvantage through not being able to obtain employment, or legal consequences. Fine (2008) suggests people engage in forms of self-presentation and impression management to modify their images in the eyes of others. If they are gossiped about or rumours are spread about them many will resort to legal or other measures to correct this, but the information on the Internet can remain there permanently.

Distinguishing between identity and reputation is important to clarify for this study. Therefore, these definitions describe what is meant by either. First, with defining identity, Hogg and Abrams (1988) describe it as a self-concept; what someone believes about themselves and how this is presented to society. Believing this, they want others to believe their self-concept as well. Wendt (1992) states identities are stable and role-specific about self, hence they want to be maintained as a presentation to others in a certain way. When a stable sense of identity is established there is little thought by the self to shape it, but when threatened or questioned repairing or revising it becomes a conscious activity to alter its presentation to the world (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; D’Cruz & Noronha, 2012).

A reputation is a product of a relationship between individuals where a person will follow a course of action creating information and expectations about themselves in the views of others (Bellah, 1986; Chong, 1992). This involves asserting power over others to maintain a positive perception of self, as occurs on Facebook when people spread rumours about others behaviour, yet give a one-sided account to protect their reputation. Krebs (1982) states this type of behaviour is about oppositional intentions; if a person is being spoken about acts altruistically then they are seen as good people and described to others as such, but if people are seen as egotistical they are talked about in negative ways. Chong (1992) states this motivates people to be self-conscious about the implications of our behaviours so we maintain a good reputation, which suggests an appreciation and awareness of the power talk and text can have over us if it is not carefully maintained.

Goffman’s (1956) work on identity has always been a key source for scholars to explain why people behave in ways to present their self-identity to the world. This is the concept Goffman calls ‘the peg’ whereby one hangs one’s presentation to the world and carries out different acts and roles according to the context of the social situation they find themselves in. When one’s identity or reputation is damaged, repairing it becomes a preoccupation. The Internet did not exist in its current form at that time, yet his assertion that people will engage in behaviours to avoid being embarrassed or humiliated and present themselves favourably to the world (Goffman, 1956) exists as much now, only the mass media have increased the potential viewing audience of those may judge a person’s identity or reputation purely on Internet content.

To illustrate, in a study of Usenet Groups, which functioned like an early form of social media does today with information sharing, Buchanan and Smith (1999) demonstrated how even with anonymity users of it would desire to avoid negative assumptions and criticisms being made about them. They would also assert power over others to convince readers of another being wrong, engaging in gossip to defend themselves against accusations. As Buchanan and Smith agree with Goffman, this was Goffman’s concept of the personal front or peg being people display to the world (Goffman, 1956, 1963) which functions to control the perception others have of one’s identity or reputation. If damaged by gossiping or rumour spreading, the person attempts to defend themselves and correct the impression others have of them to something more positive (Buchanan & Smith, 1999).

Tholander’s (2003) study of Swedish primary school pupils interacting in classrooms also demonstrated Goffman’s idea of people using gossip and rumour to protect their identities and reputation. Tholander’s key observation was that pupils would spend considerable time spreading gossip about other pupils aiming to persuade others about the trustworthiness of

those being gossiped about. Insinuating another pupil had done something wrong shaped the views of the other classmates, persuading them to believe the negative information being transmitted (Tholander, 2003). Shaping a positive reputation at the expense of another was seen daily. Yet when the gossipers' front, or reputation, is damaged by other pupils' and they in turn are gossiped about, considerable effort was undertaken to convince others it is another person who is at fault. This is now a common strategy an Internet user employ to protect their identity and reputation at the expense of another person or group.

A key finding in protecting identity and reputation studies is that people will deliberately use specific words to protect themselves while harming others if it achieves a goal of preserving one's own identity and reputation to the world positively. Using this strategy through text is a form of power because it attempts to shape someone's reputation and identity to persuade others to disapprove, shun or ignore them. The Internet is, through its anonymity, well placed to be able to facilitate this.

### **Gossip and Rumour Research**

There is a significant difference between gossiping and spreading rumours. The definition of gossip is that it is the provision of information transmitted from one person to another (Wittek & Wielers, 1998) regardless of it being factual or not. It is also an evaluative measure used to shape an opinion about someone (Eder & Enke, 1991). Gossip is usually a verbal activity but with the increased use of the Internet it functions there as a mechanism to harm others. It also has an inner-circleness to it constrained by groups or geographic regions (Rosnow & Foster, 2005). However, the Internet, as radio and television have achieved, removed this as inner circles enlarge when more people have access to information about others.

Rumours are false or true statements with inscribed private meanings that maybe be negative or positive (Donovan, 2007; Rosnow & Foster, 2005; Schmidt, 2004) but develop into beliefs about someone. People do not need intimate knowledge of those being the subject of rumours on the Internet; therefore the words that comprise a rumour can persuade someone to believe something about another and make judgements that may be false. Nevertheless, the words used about another can be powerful to persuade readers and encourage false judgements to be formed which the person may not wish to be known or are untrue.

People have always been urged to be mindful of gossip and rumours. Smith (1913) wrote in *The American Journal of Nursing* about the need for professional female nurses to guard their personal reputation. She argued female nurses must be vigilant of their behaviour when off duty. Describing how some had met a group of men who gossiped about the nurses' behaviours, Smith also argued this not only shaped the reputation of those individuals negatively, but tainted the profession of nursing as being irresponsible and of low moral standards (Smith, 1913). The article was an important cautionary one because it showed how gossip specifically could shape another's view of someone. She also cautioned that such perceptions can have far reaching consequences for themselves and the groups they identify with.

Deal (1998) described a similar situation to Smith's how others possessed power to persuade people to believe negative information using gossip and rumour power mechanisms. He described how both were used in Chester, England between 1560 and 1650 when widows were frequently described as being evil witches. Once labelled, negative reports of their

reputations and identities spread beyond the area where the gossip occurred with people suggesting to stay away from them (Deal, 1998). These women had difficulty stopping these accusations in their local area and when they travelled. They were shunned and discriminated against based purely on heresy gossip (Deal, 1998). The nurses and the widows in Deal's and Smith's studies experienced the power others used to shape their reputations in a harmful way due to the transmission of gossip and rumour that influenced perceptions others had of them. Early studies argued gossip was a phenomenon operating in tight-knit private groups or connected physical communities (Deal, 1998; Fiske, 1987; Spacks, 1986). Now it operates in larger spaces and has the potential to harm as greater numbers of people have access to information about others (Harrington & Bielby, 1995). Internet users employ these power mechanisms to protect their identity and reputation whilst damaging others, assisted by the ease to do this across the Internet (Pearson, 2009). The persons gossiping or spreading rumours are asserting a form of power over another. This effectively persuades others that harmful and inaccurate information is true about someone and influence others to make decisions about that person based on this information.

### **Methodology and Method**

This study uses CDA principles and practices that key scholars such as van Dijk (2001, 1995) and Fairclough (1989, 1995) state demonstrate the operation of power and what inequalities exist in text. It is crucial to be state upfront that the goal of CDA, and this study, is to unmask embedded and concealed power relations that can shape identity and reputation, the act of explaining relationships between language, power and ideology as shown in texts (Janks, 1998). It is a method that focuses on relationships of power, dominance and inequality, how these are reproduced through text (van Dijk, 2001; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997) and importantly it is not a neutral approach to texts yet rigour will be discussed in this section.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis Method**

Critical Discourse Analysis examines written text systematically for specific examples of the operation of power relations that may exist. It focuses on relationships of power, dominance and inequality, and how these are reproduced through text (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; van Dijk, 2001). This study does the following:

1. It addresses a growing social problem, in this study being the potential harm a negative presentation of one's identity and reputation on the Internet and its consequences may cause;
2. The ideological work of CDA is to describe the power relations that are occurring between people who attempt to persuade others to believe information about another's identity and reputation in a particular way; and,
3. Such an analysis aims to describe the types of social interactions people have with each other that shape identity and reputation and how this is achieved through the written texts.

### **Research Question**

The research question was, what are the characteristics of text from an Internet site that has the potential power to shape the identity and reputation of the person depicted in the text and how do they do this?

### **Sampling, Data Collection, Analysis and Ethical Issues**

I collected 100 postings from Lamebook generated from users who posted Facebook extracts to it. The data are valid because they were not altered in any way. I also obtained written permission from the owners of Lamebook to use the postings. I addressed the ethical use of data following advice from The Association of Internet Researchers (AOIR; 2002), Bruckman (2002) and Madge (2007). First, that no password is required to be used to access the site so all postings are public and second, Lamebook's policy does not specifically prohibit the online material from being studied. The data were managed by using Weft QDA qualitative software as an aid in organising large amounts of text.

Three questions were asked of the texts during the analysis:

1. What types of relationships are occurring and between whom?
2. What aspects of power are being demonstrated, such as, who has what power over whom and what examples show this?
3. What can be drawn from the performances of those who post harmful text that suggest power is being exercised to persuade others information about another?

I identified who was involved and then examined the words to see where and how unequal power relations were being used to harm others and, importantly, draw out and describe inferences about why they may be harmful to the perception of one's identity or reputation. Paying attention to the way certain words are used and the way they are presented and drawing inferences from them is an important first step in identifying power relations between people.

The next step was to break down the text into micro-detail, framing it into categories. Assigning a category is important to give order to the text and illustrate examples where power relations that are unequal are persuading others to judge those who post the online information. Once data are analysed inferences about the text were made about what is going on in terms of power relations. It also assists in showing any patterns of power relations and identifies repeated things that are happening, as well as building an explanation of what is occurring.

As van Dijk (2001) advises, the way the text is constructed needs to demonstrate the particular linguistic style and wording that suggests inequality is taking place. What the results demonstrate are power mechanisms, operating through gossip and rumour, being structured and used to cause suffering, stigma, shame, injustice, inequality, insecurity and self-doubt (Fairclough et al., 2004) which do shape our views of how we view someone.

### **Criticisms of CDA, Researcher Relationship to the Data and Study Rigor**

CDA research is criticised because the researcher is not neutral in drawing out and writing about the power relations being exercised. It is clear that it is a specific specialised set of methods that search for patterns of social inequality amongst groups exercised by power imbalances (van Dijk, 1993; Wodak, 2002). It is a way of describing how these operate. As the Internet is a place where someone's identity or reputation based on the material posted online can be a site of power imbalance, CDA is appropriate for this study.

My position as researcher to the text is not to assume that every person is a victim of power struggles through gossip and rumour, but to highlight what the social problem of harm that comes from Internet information is and how this problem manifests. Reisigl and Wodak (2001) advise on a way to manage bias in CDA studies; be consistently sceptical of the data as one interprets it. Being sceptical means being aware I am examining text, not gathering information verbally from the authors who posted information on Facebook that was reproduced on Lamebook. This acknowledges a weakness of a CDA study; that it is strictly textual and the researcher may misunderstand in their interpretation of the text the actual intent of the author.

Achieving rigor drew on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) advice. First, the methodological framework is explicit aiding the study by being open about what is being sought, a hallmark of an ethical study (Higginbottom, Pillay & Boadu, 2013). Second, the study can be transferable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This is where employing a detailed account of how power is operating, making explicit the patterns of relationships between those involved and putting them in a context and using the process of thick description (Geertz, 1973; Holloway; 1997) encourages a rigorous analysis. Thick description involves describing as best as possible the behaviours but also the contexts in which they occur (Geertz, 1973). Rigor is achieved in this study because it goes beyond mere description and demonstrates how power operates by providing details and context where inequalities have occurred so the reader can reach their own conclusions about the findings.

### **Findings: How Does Power Shape Identity and Reputation?**

Inequalities and injustices exist in the Lamebook texts because when private information becomes public knowledge through gossiping and rumour spreading, it shapes the identity and reputation of the person. As Goffman (1963) stated, the author's peg or presentation strategy is to encourage positive perceptions of their own identity or reputation whilst persuading readers of the negative attributes of another. In these postings we likely do not know the person's involved, yet we make judgements about them based on our own interpretations. These tend to be less favourably and can, and do, influence our perceptions of someone that may not be what that person or the person being discussed wants to happen.

Fairclough (1992) states a social practice is learnt from the external messages a person receives from it, which then become accepted by all. This is an accurate assessment of the current use of social media. People make the choice to post private information about others and will post information that makes others look villainous and immoral. Gossip and rumour spreading are the main practices that are used as power strategies on the Internet. This social practice has become engrained in society as we choose to communicate more information to greater numbers using this medium.

The categories which suggested gossip and rumours were being used to assert power to bring inequalities to others involved reoccurring topics. These were: sexual shaming including

adultery and infidelity, conflicts with parents, accusations of inappropriate behaviours such as paedophilia and bestiality, disclosing private information about one's self, admission of drug use, racist jokes and sexist comments mostly about women. Although the reader may be amused by such admissions, the mere presence of them on Facebook, and their reproduction on Lamebook, can create a problem if it is seen by someone who will base decisions about the author or victim purely on the text that exists.

### **Examples of the Operation of Power: Gossiping and Rumour Making**

In these examples, the power to persuade the reader and evaluate someone's behaviour is illustrated. As Duncan (2004) states, gossip encourages group cohesion by creating stronger group identification particularly when trying to present one's self as positive and the other negative. However, the context of the Internet makes it difficult not to judge behaviours if that person does not repair negative views of themselves. In these examples people gossip and spread rumours to shape our view of someone in a negative way because of something they may, or may not have, done.

In Example 1 the text the authors' write encourages group solidarity and agreement by accusing someone of bestiality, convincing the reader that person is villainous and immoral, emphasised by the use of capital letter in the initial accusation:

#### **Example 1:**

**Author 1:** By the way no one knows the nick I know....He had Sizzle lick peanut butter of his (male genitalia)!!! AND HE DID IT WITH JAKE HIS OTHER DOG TOO!!!

**Author 2:** Really? That kid is into bestiality? What a sicko, get the (expletive) away from that friggin loser! What the hell is wrong with u nikki?? U can easily do much better than him in no time at all. Ur crazy lill lady

**Author 3:** My guess is.....peanut butter is not just for eating anymore!!!! Lmao. But for real tho I will never look at p/b the same anymore.

**Author 4:** wow, is this something that should be on Facebook?

**Author 1:** Def. Barb the addict kicked me out cause I wouldnt lend him money to get high....

Author 4 tries to deflect the conversation by stating if this should be on Facebook, but author 1 responds by re-enforcing hence the power exerted here is to maintain the victim's identity as immoral and untrustworthy. This is a common tactic used to preserve one's reputation whilst shaping another's negatively. Example 2 further supports this power strategy as the male author derides his previous partner shaping her to be promiscuous:



**Example 2:**

**Author 2:** (Female): Who is in the yellow?

**Author 1:** (Male): (name of person masked) my slut ex gf

**Author 3:** (Female): i still can't believe you actually brought this in my house

**Author 2:** i wouldn't be surprised if he rode it around the house

**Author 1:** are u talking about the bike or the whore?

**Author 3:** both

The gossiping here shows solidarity amongst people by transmitting information about a person's identity and reputation influences our view of behaviours. Setting up oppositional roles is done by the initiating author to present their view of the world as right, hence protecting them while persuading others to view the person being gossiped about to be at fault.

This strategy is taken further when the gossip or rumour spreading involves serious accusations. In Example 3, the originating author has not hidden any details about their intent to find out if a family member is a sex offender. The power strategy here is, as it is a controversial subject, we can be persuaded that the mere mention the father is a potential offender means his identity and reputation is one of being that:

**Example 3:**

**Author 1:** I need to find a free site that doesn't require registration to help me see if my dad registered as a sex offender, or not. If anyone knows of such a site, please let me know. He is not listed on Megan's law and if I find out he did not register, I am going to turn his ass in.

**Author 2:** i have an app on my iphone---i will check on there. what is his full name?

**Author 1:** Terry..thank you, hun, I owe you.

It is common that disclosing sexual behaviours such as this are widespread on social media as sources of rumour and gossip to shame and stigmatise people. The authors' make sure deceit is exposed to shape our view of the person who did the act. In Example 4, the author discloses the behaviour of someone who deceived someone into marrying them because of a fake pregnancy test.

**Example 4:**

**Author:** When you called me to ask me for my pregnant urine so you could trick Matt, I really didn't want any part of that. But I went against my better instincts with that one. Then the next thing I hear about 4 days later, you married him. You tricked that man into thinkin

that you were indeed pregnant with his baby. Then after marrying him, you told him it's an ectopic pregnancy and you keep lying to him. Your marriage is based on lies...I feel tricked as your friend, betrayed that you would even let something that concerns me go as far like this. You don't even have the guts to be honest with me.

Example 5, displaying another common power strategy that shapes our view of someone's reputation, is a woman who discloses her husband's infidelity despite being separated from him. Like Example 4 the author discloses the act but this example clearly shows how the author uses words to present herself in a positive way maintaining her identity and reputation as positive whilst shaping her husband's negatively in a persuasive manner as well as the alleged mistress:

### Example 5:

**Author:** Who's idiot husband sends his mistress Valentine's Day flowers through UPS where his wife works? MINE! We've been separated for over 2 years but have been working on the marriage on and off, and he texts me every night good night and said Love you...I took back seat to 4 affairs with him. I know that makes me look totally dumb but I'm a kind hearted person, who believes people can change...So ladies if your man goes to LA Fitness you better warn him to stay away from the town slut that's a personal trainer there! I heard from many people she: Gives more rides than a Taxi. Gives more turns than a door knob. She's open like a 7 eleven...Hopefully he shares this post with his whore too, who is by the way married with 5 sons. Oh and yes I did contact her husband about the flowers, because he has every right to know!

The tone of this gossip is confessional because she discloses the revenge strategy, she has to deal with this. She convinces the reader of the sexual impropriety and betrayal well, shaping our view of the husband and the mistress as perpetrators.

However, examples 4 and 5 suggest by their tone and misspellings that some postings are written in haste. This does not mean a power strategy is employed to shape someone's reputation or identity, but rather the intention, aside from anger, may be misinterpreted. In Example 6 the author posts explicit comments about his mother's alleged infidelity. Although the reader is unsure if this is a humorous post or not, the author clearly wants readers to view his mother's reputation and identity as adulterous and dishonest. A Facebook friend uses humour as a response to the oral sex reference, but the tone of the author's writing suggests some act did occur that is not humorous or amusing:

### Example 6:

**Author 1:** Just when I thought things could not get any worst, I found out my mom is sucking someone else's (male genitals) behind my dad's back, but not only that, she cheated on whoever the (expletive) she was with. So pretty much my mom is a slut at the age of 50?

**Author 2:** DAMN BROTHER your family problems suck.

However, another variant of power the analysis showed was when the person who committed an act attempts to construct their identity and reputation as positive but another's negative. This is usually shown when people disclose their intimate relationship problems online. This can result in unintended power; that is, the power here is that it shapes our view of both authors in a negative way, as well as question why they would allow private disclosures in a public space. Example 7 shows such an exchange where author 1 employs words to convince author 2 to forgive her then uses words to attempt to damage the other author's reputation by posting infidelity and other sexual behaviours:

### Example 7:

**Author 1:** If you really love me like you say you do you could forgive me, we got a baby together...we're both miserable and lost without each other, this is ridiculous, i said I was sorry i meant it, lets not forget you did me way dirtier...if you really wanna cut me off this easily then there is NO POSSIBLE WAY THAT YOU EVER LOVED ME

**Author 2:** ...i love you more than i love myself, but i can't be with you because i thought you were a completely different person i know i have (expletive) up but I thought you were better than me..but your not.. you let me down..i really thought you were a good girl

**Author 1:** then i shoulda just cut you off after you got your (male genitals) sucked by another girl because i thought youd never do that to me...(expletive) you! you act like everything you did to me was fine!

**Author 2:** Stop putting this (expletive) on here if u wanna talk i'll give you one last talk

**Author 1:** being with someone else does make me sick to my stomach. i havent been with anyone else

**Author 1:** lol one last talk? You wwon't even pick up my calls. i'm done with the texting (expletive). at least here I can type fast and get my thoughts out

**Author 1:** you (expletive) destroyed all my (expletive) ! what's left? mini fridge and my dresser?

**Author 2:** u got other (expletive) to but fine don't whatever then u don't give a (expletive) this (expletive) is going all over the internet im done talkin to you

**Author 1:** the BABY IS SICK !! I can't just leave her

**Author 2:** have a nice life then

**Author 1:** wow youre (expletive) crazy...that's your baby

This interchange shapes both author's identity and reputation, suggesting that even online as in the physical world, people will accuse and defend often shifting topics to continue the argument. The language here shifts from persuading the reader to support author 1, yet author 2 uses language to try to deflect the criticisms. Both are trying to present to the world a positive view of their identity whilst constructing the other as negative. This interchange of power strategies is common on social media. Author 1 tries to shame author 2 by using their sick child to re-enforce our view author 1 is irresponsible and sexually dishonest. The inequalities here shape our view towards either or both towards a negative perception supported by the disclosure of their personal relationship issues in a public forum.

Whilst example 7 shapes our view of two individuals, other examples involve an online audience of participants who support the person who is using power to persuade others of a person's negative traits. Example 2 alluded to this with name-calling an ex-partner, but in example 8 the scorned author uses humiliation to gather support in the online fight with the previous partner they had broken up with.

### **Example 8:**

**Author 1:** Is single

Another Friend marks author status as 'likes this'

**Author 2:** Don't like this, bitch.

**Author 1:** i love u but we can't do this any longer

**Author 2:** You are SO PATHETIC

**Author 1:** U never really cared about me u wanted me to leave anyway don't say you didn't want this

**Author 2:** All you wanted from me was sex

**Author 1:** Yeah and did I ever get it maybe once or twice a man has needs

**Author 2:** Yeah, well maybe if you didn't have sex with my best friend I would have more.

**Author 3:** Was his (male genitalia) size a factor?

**Author 1:** Oh yeah...I don't like having sex with something I have to put under a microscope to see.

The presence of author 3's comment shows how the power strategy used to shape someone's identity and reputation in negative ways can persuade another to believe what is written. Gossip here creates unity here which further suggests that it is possible others will believe something negative about a person, judge them harshly and unfairly without facts and then choose to interact with them or not. Even if the reader who does this has no connection to those involved, it demonstrates the idea underlying the social practice of being careless

with what appears online has the power to shape identity and reputation, and in turn as occurred to Adam Devine with his unintended paedophile comment, does have consequences in one's physical offline environment.

## Discussion

These Facebook posts reproduced on Lamebook display how power operates to shape the identity and reputation of people who post there through the mechanisms of gossip and rumour making. Even if we do not know these authors the posts still can influence us to judge others harshly and unfairly, which can, and has, impacted on their own lives. These texts may be a small sample, but represent the operations of power within the discourse, or written text arena these posts operate in thus suiting a CDA analysis (Gatling et al., 2014, Wodak & Meyer, 2009). From the sample, the main social practice occurring suggesting some form of power to shape identity and reputation negatively is how one or more authors' use particular language strategies to maintain their identity and reputation as positive and an opposition negative. These behaviour strategies, of presentation, repairing and persuading others to believe negative information about another, are typical findings of identity and reputation research. However, the Internet's broad social context and the difference between it and other mass media in its immediacy pose a problem for those who choose to use it as the Facebook posters have in this study.

Gatling et al. (2014) assert in their CDA study of middle-age representations, the film industry possesses much power to influence and control discourses and their outcomes. Whilst this is true, this study suggests the Internet is a place where there is more visibility of "ordinary" citizens, immediate interactivity compared to other mass media and greater ability to record and keep documentation of activity. These authors have been wronged in some way and in presenting the often private and unsubstantiated information about another are trying to persuade the reader to judge another's action. Although it may be conjecture what we read of these Facebook postings and we may not know the intent of the author, the fact that these private postings have appeared in a public space, Lamebook, caution us about the potential power such postings have to shape our own identity and reputation.

Internet psychologists suggest that the Internet is a different medium for disclosure, more immediate and widespread than others, and that we normally monitor our behaviours before we say something about someone (Martin, 2013); but we are disinhibited, as Suler (2004) describes it, online. This gives a form of power to users because it is more immediate a medium to post something in haste or anger, whereas there are vetting processes and time lags to doing this on radio or television. As Deal (1998) states in his study of women being accused of witchcraft, when they moved to other parts of England they brought their tarnished reputation and judgments from others about the women's identities to a new place even if they did not know them. The shaping to a negative perception is difficult to repair. I argue that this is the case in current times with the use of the Internet, but we can carry a negative perception anywhere if we are not aware of what is posted about us online. These women had a physical presence to prove themselves not as witches; the negative perceptions of us online take much work to correct as we are not present individually to the large audience this medium brings.

In answering this study's research question, the characteristics of the text that had power to shape identity and reputation were reasonable easy to identify. Shaming and stigma type

words, and accusations and attacks using controversial topics such as sexual behaviours, were present in the data set. How these were done were by revealing details of private interactions between the authors and with others supporting the author making these accusations. This may be common behaviour in human societies, but again from a CDA perspective, the social practices within the space of the Internet make us aware of what people can do to shape others' view of our identity and reputation. This is why unmasking power relations is, whilst viewed as subjective and conjecture by some as having a bias in CDA work, crucial to understanding the types of activities people do to present themselves positively and others not so.

Perhaps Smith (1913) is correct in urging us to be cautious of our identity and reputation presentation. This analysis not just shows the type of text that shapes what we think about others; it has shown us that the language strategies used have wider implications on our offline lives. Gossip and reputation have been powerful mechanisms that have had negative impacts on many lives. Internet users may be doing the same thing, but they have a wider, more immediate audience who do not always forget the words spoken that harm what we seek to protect; our identity and our reputation.

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## Chapter Summary and Conclusions

This chapter's purpose was to examine the complex ethical issue of the potential effects on employment, relationships and reputations arising from the content users post on Facebook. Reputation, what others think of us, is important and as sociologist Goffman stated, is often crafted in impression management. Employers are using public social media data, and asking for private social media data, to make a decision about employing the person. Yet this is being challenged by generations who may not be as concerned about what is posted online. Other researchers consider using social media to judge a candidate's suitability is unethical. Three unfair dismissal cases were presented that show how employees taking their employers to court or tribunals are becoming a major problem and the failure of companies to develop and promote its social media policies. Finally, my published paper on one's online reputation and identity being shaped by gossip and rumour, and what it can do to people's lives.

The next chapter is the book's conclusion and I give my thoughts on the Facebook as well as a summary of the book.

## Notes

- 1 Quote taken from a 2009 address by former United States President Barack Obama at Wakefield High School in Arlington, Virginia, United States September 8, 2009, from Reuters Technology News website (2009).
- 2 Excerpt of a Facebook post that was obtained from Australia's ABC News website written by Williams (2017). It shows the type of interaction that occurs when an employer asks a job candidate to look at the candidate's Facebook page. This is common, but in many countries it is not illegal to ask the job candidate for the Facebook password.
- 3 Article by Burkes written in 2019 in the online newspaper The Oklahoman.
- 4 According to the PR Newswire website, the survey this site is reporting was a national survey conducted in the United States that was done on behalf of a company called CareerBuilder with more than 1000 hiring managers and human resource professionals surveyed. For the purposes of illustrating that looking at potential job candidates' social media presence, this example is adequate although more reliable surveys do exist. It does show that the practice of looking at social media profiles is a growing trend in many societies.
- 5 A formal definition of cultural fit is given by CompanyMatch (n.d.) as:

Cultural Fit is defined as the individual's attitudes, values and beliefs being in line with the core values and culture of an organisation.
- 6 Names of the people involved have been masked and this essay is not in the public domain.
- 7 Full case can be read at Austlii (2016) at this web address:  
[https://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdoc/au/cases/cth/FWC/2016/6186.html?context=1;query=Facebook%20post;mask\\_path=](https://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdoc/au/cases/cth/FWC/2016/6186.html?context=1;query=Facebook%20post;mask_path=)
- 8 Such of this case paraphrases the Austlii (2016) website, therefore it appears in the Works Cited list.
- 9 ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) is a terrorist organisation.
- 10 The details of the Linfox unfair dismissal case can be found at Austlii (2012), however, this address though listing the appeal Linfox made over the Fair Work Commission ruling, contains details of Stutsel's claim at this web address:  
[https://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdoc/au/cases/cth/FWAFB/2012/7097.html?context=1;query=Stutsel%20v%20Linfox%20Australia%20Pty%20Ltd;mask\\_path=](https://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdoc/au/cases/cth/FWAFB/2012/7097.html?context=1;query=Stutsel%20v%20Linfox%20Australia%20Pty%20Ltd;mask_path=)

11 This is a Facebook Post case in the United States District Court with information about it obtained from the United States case law website found on the World Wide Web at:  
<https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/tennessee/tnwdce/2:2017cv02873/78825/122/>

12 According to the website History.com (2018):

Jefferson Davis (1808-1889) was a Mexican War hero, U.S. senator from Mississippi, U.S. secretary of war and president of the Confederate States of America for the duration of the American Civil War (1861-1865). Prior to the start of the war, Davis had argued against secession, but when Mississippi seceded he resigned from the U.S. Senate. In February 1861 he was elected president of the Confederacy. He was charged with treason and was living in poverty in New Orleans until 1867.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## CONCLUSIONS AND CLOSING THOUGHTS ABOUT THIS EXPLORATION OF FACEBOOK

“I just am not on Facebook much anymore myself. I’m a bit over some of it. Given the way (most people now) use it, I can only say it’s a sandpit for personality disorders!” - (Nathan, personal communication, July 8, 2019)<sup>1</sup>

I’ve removed the pressure of the pursuit of constant happiness and success. The flip side of Facebook beyond the extreme negativity is the extreme positivity. Although well-intentioned, the constant barrage of positive messaging often negatively impacts us because we feel something is wrong with us when we don’t feel “strong, happy, and blessed.” - Marissa Levin<sup>2</sup>

Until recently, there hasn’t been a good system for you to keep in touch with all of the other people who are in your life who you meet at some point who are important or were important and you want to keep up with, but you don’t have a way to talk to on a day to day basis, and you wouldn’t go out of your way to call, and you would never sit down with them in person. It’s the power that’s unlocked from that to what we’re seeing here. - Mark Zuckerberg<sup>3</sup>

This book explored Facebook and many issues surrounding the interactions that take place within it. Although it discussed many negative and challenging issues the platform and its users have experienced, Facebook is ultimately the domain of the user to use as they wish within certain boundaries set by Facebook. Sharing information online and within groups has long been a part of the Internet landscape. Facebook being a global platform used by billions will still experience technical, social and cultural problems that need constant attention to address.

This chapter summarises, gives conclusions and my closing thoughts on Facebook. I called the book *Facebook: Exploring the Social Network and its Challenges* because it explored several topics that challenged the platform costing user trust and financial penalties. I did include a chapter on positive uses of Facebook because the benefits of using it for sharing information and giving people support are worthwhile. Therefore, although your data does still gets mined and put into algorithms for targeting, and there is much arguing and trolling online, Facebook can still bring some of the benefits that Mark Zuckerberg envisaged. It is the choice of the person to create an account and the user is responsible for their content.

### Chapter Summaries

This book has discussed the following:

#### Chapter One:

This chapter laid the basis of, and set the context for, how social media was defined, what is Facebook and where it is located on the World Wide Web and on mobile phone apps. Technical, security and personal issues to join, or not, were discussed showing how Facebook

needs consideration of the potential impact it may have on a user before they join it. A substantive, but not totally comprehensive, discussion of how to join, set up a profile and, importantly, set up security and News Feed options followed. The different types of ways of friending people and sending messages was then set out, showing how one can remove the Add Friend button if wanted. Also important was a discussion of blocking and unfriending other Facebook users which can be necessary. A discussion of groups and pages followed.

The countries where Facebook is banned by governments and reasons why was reported. Then a discussion of Facebook's Terms and Services and Community standards took place. Community standards are pivotal to the conduct of Facebook users and play a part in decisions to impose penalties on those who break them. Facebook jail, where the person is banned from using Facebook for various times, was discussed and the controversies around this issue.

## **Chapter Two:**

Facebook's history since 2004 has involved many people and situations as it grew fast. This substantive chapter consulted many sources and followed a timeline historic approach. Beginning with a biography of Mark Zuckerberg, it described his life at Harvard and his idea of what Facebook should become. Not every incident was discussed in the chapter, but the content was substantive in an attempt to cover as many areas as possible. The timeline events were divided into:

2004 - 2006: The beginnings of Facebook, not just Zuckerberg but others who were involved in its creation and the politics around it that ended up in future legal action. This section highlighted its very fast growth from a private Harvard university system to being able to be used by the public. This period also marked the ongoing quest to make new features for users, especially the important concept of tagging others that were the first steps to making it a sharing platform.

2007 - 2015: This period of time was marked with growing pains and turbulent incidents that tested Facebook's resolve to continue. In 2008 a major milestone of 100 million users with Facebook accounts<sup>4</sup> was reached. But overshadowing this expansion was the Winklevoss Twins lawsuit against Facebook with the claim their ideas were stolen by Zuckerberg and others. Additional court cases became a part of Facebook's legal landscape. Significantly, in 2009 the Like button was introduced that saved people typing responses to every post, which in 2020 now comprise of seven like icons from sad to angry and others. In 2011 privacy concerns about Facebook and its use of user data began emerging. Zuckerberg, mindful of competition and the desire users had for more features, purchased messaging service WhatsApp and the now well-used photo sharing app Instagram.

2016 - 2020: This period of time saw many incidents and commercial decisions by Facebook that lead to a loss of much trust and declining Facebook use. In 2016 Facebook Live allowing people to communicate on the platform by live videos and was welcomed despite its later misuse by users. News feed problems plagued Facebook and trending topics issues annoyed users as Facebook attempted to fix this problem. Yet Facebook continued to be financially viable and grew in value. Zuckerberg wanted Facebook to be a global community, releasing a community

building manifesto in 2017. Users also became upset over Facebook's censorship rules which were applied inconsistently, as seen in the breast-feeding photos issue resulting in posts removed and users banned. Yet more controversies were to come despite the work Facebook did to address declining Facebook use. The concerns over Russian influence in the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States, the data misuse, targeted profiling and microtargeting Cambridge Analytica scandal, as well as fake news all harmed Facebook's reputation. Finally, a brief discussion of two Facebook cinema offerings, *The Social Network* movie and *The Cleaners* documentary completed the chapter.

### **Chapter Three:**

Despite much negativity surrounding the use of Facebook, this chapter discussed three examples where Facebook benefitted the individual and the community. These three were: the use of Facebook in education, Facebook friendships and Facebook groups. Education groups and pages on Facebook can potentially assist students studying at many levels. These were found to operate in two ways: support for understanding and helping with any type of academic or school problem, and emotional support when students are struggling. A substantial section on Facebook friends, the platform's main use, discussed many topics about it including the advantages and disadvantages of having Facebook friends. It included reasons why people might unfriend each other. The third topic, Facebook groups, showed how these can be supportive and be an effective source of sharing information and making friendships. However, it is important to have rules and behavioural standards in groups were discussed. The famous story of Dibble's experience of a troll attacking a group was discussed as were the difficulties of managing groups when conflicts arise in any type of group.

### **Chapter Four:**

This chapter discussed three negative uses of Facebook: trolling, addiction and issues with the use of Facebook live streaming. Trolling, arguing and cyberbullying have been an unpleasant and widespread problem on Facebook. John Suler's Online Disinhibition Effect assisted in understanding why people will act in such negative ways towards others. Not being physically present with a person can mean people are more likely to abuse others. The phenomenon of cancel culture, where reputations are ruined, was also discussed that is now a common occurrence of which Facebook users partake in. The next topic discussed was Facebook addiction which has taken much time to be recognised as a serious mental health issue. Lastly, the misuse of the Facebook Live Stream, as illustrated by the 2019 Christchurch incident, showed the challenges the platform faces in stopping such unpleasant events being viewed without imposing censorship. Other issues such as Fear of Missing Out, ghosting, sleep issues and posting private information about one's self showed how users experience negative effects of too much Facebook use.

### **Chapter Five:**

The issues of Facebook algorithms, the Cambridge Analytica scandal and fake news have become significant for the user, at best concerning users, at worst cause a mistrust in the platform. Algorithms are controversial, as shown by the Facebook News Feed algorithm changes Facebook has attempted to correct. Users do not like their news feed being targeted for advertisements, but this remained a problem Facebook has taken much time to address.

The Cambridge Analytica data breach was a scandal resulting in widespread consequences for Facebook in terms of user trust as they did not attempt to get back the user data from Cambridge Analytica. Finally, a discussion of fake news and its affect on democracy found that such news can influence a person's view on someone or some issues. Facebook grapples with these issues still and fake news has been proven to have detrimental effects on society.

### **Chapter Six:**

Facebook posts do have potential effects on a person's reputation. This chapter discussed why reputation needs to be managed carefully especially in the area of gaining and maintaining employment. Sociologist Goffman's theories about impression management do operate online as they do in the physical world. Three unfair dismissal cases were discussed illustrating how this has become a major problem for employers who should be conveying their social media policies to their workforces. Finally, I presented a published paper on reputation and identity and how it is shaped online by rumour and gossip. This is, and remains, an ethical issue for Facebook users who believe their accounts should be private and have freedom to post content they wish, against the growing practice of employers making judgments based on what is on the Internet about the applicant.

### **The Facebook Exploration Journey: Observations and Closing Thoughts**

Facebook has a dual nature. The benefits that it has brought society are numerous. Yet they have come at the cost of privacy. It has to be acknowledged again that it is a choice to join it and post content on it. That is important because people will often argue Facebook is something that can be walked away from. This may be true, but Facebook has become, like other platforms, outlets for thoughts that previously could not be expressed. It has bred a place to find like-minded people as physical communities become more isolated. For all its connection it has also caused and fostered division. The term double-edge sword may be a cliché, but in exploring the issues in this book, that is an apt term to apply to Facebook.

An ongoing debate reflecting this is the question, is Facebook a platform or a publisher? That is, is its role actually a publisher of others' content rather than just a host of it on a platform? This means it is not a neutral technology, nor a repository of data and information, but is accountable for the content posted on it. If Facebook were actually a neutral operation with zero responsibility for anything its users post, like some sort of cork board in a public square, then it would have to allow anything and would never take any sort of action (Dvorak, 2018). But this is precisely what is still being debated and has not been resolved in any court as at time of writing this book.

Social media has been blamed for issues such as trolling, argueing and addiction among others. It is a complex arguement because it references back to our choice to use it or not. Professor of Psychology Shmuel Vaknin fiercely argues social media has a dangerous effect on peoples' minds. As he states in this criticism of it (Grannon & Vaknin, 2018, p. 6):

Social media is the most asocial invention ever, like ever. It encouraged more asocial behavior than anything before or after, in my view. Social media created an unprecedented wave of withdrawal and automization. That's a reaction to negativity and so on. On the other hand, those who have aggressive tendencies and so on would find social media an ideal turf. They gravitate toward social media and of course enhance the toxicity. It's a self-perpetuating feedback loop, a



negative filter which amplifies and attracts and connects like-minded, aggressive, dangerous, lethal, the crazy (*sic*) people.

Trolling and argueing are almost like a magnet to some people on Facebook and other social media. Topics inflame not debate but arguement. Fake news is believed. The nature of debating, a foundation of a democratic society, has degenerated into an uncivil wasteland of conflict.

Many people regardless if they are Facebook users or not have a view on Facebook. A selection of quotes taken from Goodreads (2020) reflects the diversity of opinions about it:



Figure 109. Quotes about Facebook (Goodreads, 2020)

It can be seen from these quotes the large number of issues that Facebook has brought to people. I do accept peoples' views that Facebook has created an artificial world of friendship. You can find support for issues and share hobbies or other interests with people worldwide that can help a person. I have also found it interesting how polarising it is when school, university or work people ask some for a friend request. Some do not want contact with such people preferring the past to be left behind. Yet others welcome reconnection even if it may bring back previously unresolved issues for the user. But that past person may bring richness to one's life and evoke good memories that are fun to discuss.

Yet the self-promotion and the "I am right" perspective of users, including politicians and celebrities, can be tiring. Communication with others, not just the famous who will unlikely respond to you, can be one-way on Facebook. Friends who do not respond to your posts, or

even like your posts, can be frustrating to the user. It may seem odd to some that people become hooked or addicted to Facebook interactions. Vaknin is again apt to quote here as he questions the ideas mentioned in this book that Facebook was made to be addictive, though he is being general in this quote about all social media (Grannon & Vaknin, 2018, p. 12):

If the whole platform was built for addiction, as the chief engineer himself (sic) admits. If you knew that you were creating addiction, why didn't you limit the number of pills? Why didn't you limit the usage from the very beginning? Why did you have to wait until, by a rough estimate, 20 thousand teens died every year, every single year? Why did you have to wait for this to happen, before you introduced a watch?

Attention seeking and validation is a built-in part of social media. People do want to connect and belong to communities, but Facebook may be not a good way to do this. People have embraced replacing physical human contact with connection only through using the Internet. Wanting to belong is a powerful and as Vaknin argues, to be denied that, to be excommunicated from a group or person is a harsh punishment (Grannon & Vaknin, 2018). There are other friends and groups available, but being unfriended or unfairly removed from a Facebook group does, to some, hurt very much.

The final task for this chapter is to reflect on the chapters and what occurred to me as being profound, serious and alarming when researching Facebook. Most of this book's topics and content is negative because in exploring Facebook they do outweigh the positive things Zuckerberg envisaged back in Harvard. I have written previous on negative topics about the Internet such as cyberbullying, trolling and hacking that have become major issues for Internet users, governments and lawmakers. Yet in examining these problems solutions can be formed that will allow people to continue to rightfully use it.

I present each of my main insights in writing this book in three separate boxes because they are the topics which for me stand out about Facebook:

The relationships that were damaged as Mark Zuckerberg moved the Facebook into the corporate arena. People have varied views on his character. Some have suggested he may have some autism spectrum issue. Others enjoy making fun of him. But the way he discarded some for the sake of the platform suggested he put his interests ahead of friendship. However, it is unclear if he is ruthless, kind, caring towards his users or lives in some make-believe version of his own personal reality oblivious to others. It seems like a combination. There are enough books, articles and commentaries written about him that people will make up their own minds about him regardless if they know him personally or not. Regardless of its unethical beginnings as rating women's 'hotness' at Harvard, the platform's ideas as spaces of sharing, support and community still have been achieved.

I am concerned about the judging people do to each other on Facebook often not basing their abuse and hostility, and cancel culture, on facts but on content presentation. If someone does something wrong and it is posted on Facebook, it becomes an online lynch mob. Apologies if it turns out the mob is wrong are rare and defending one's self and reputation can turn into a futile attempt to repair it. I also do not agree with employers using Facebook and other social media to base a decision to employ someone or not. Some industries this is required, but having had discussions with employers myself, it seems that not having an online presence can be a liability to reputation as well. Hiring someone is risky in any situation and while I agree with managing one's projected image on Facebook is wise, I also agree with the literature that says it is an unethical practice to hire or not based on one's social media and Internet presence.

Lastly, I do not write this as blaming any user, but I have been interested since first encountering the Internet why Facebook and other sites take a central role in one's life rather than them being an aid. Shy people have been using the Internet, or those with any type of disability, which has been a positive way to access information and find acceptance in a world that judges on physical presentation. As I have researched cyberbullying and trolling, I have been asked why people are abusive towards one another on the Internet. I have agreed with Suler's (2004) ideas that people are less inhibited online. People are angry over issues and may not feel anyone is listening. Getting together in solidarity against an enemy is natural. The cycle though of outrage and abuse can be often short-lived on Facebook as people move on to new targets often quickly. That will unlikely be solved, but to be aware of how to manage being trolled or bullied is an important part of being online that must be kept in mind for physical and emotional safety.

I want to use an image that symbolises the relationship I have with Facebook to close this book. It is from NeONBRAND (n.d.) that shows Facebook badges with likes and the logos on them. These are in different positions scattered across the white surface. It represents the turbulent exploration I have had writing this book on Facebook.



Figure 110. Facebook badges (NeONBRAND, n.d.)

## Notes

- 1 Personal communication from Nathan, surname withheld by request.
- 2 Quote from Marissa Levin from Inc website.
- 3 Quote from Mark Zuckerberg from the book Billionaire Boy page 58, where he is interviewed at the Computer History Museum on the 21 July 2010.
- 4 This was the number of users generally, not active Facebook users; that is, those that used the platform regularly.

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**Facebook has become the world's largest social media platform. It offers sharing, support and a place to build communities. Yet it has had controversies that have eroded the public's trust in it. This book explores Facebook, its history and the many issues it has experienced.**

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