**We know better than to allow Facebook to control the metaverse**

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In the midst of the scandals of the [Facebook papers](https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2021/10/25/what-are-the-facebook-papers/), Facebook [rebranded the company as Meta](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/10/28/facebook-is-trying-reposition-its-brand-it-probably-wont-work/). The new name was designed to reflect a focus beyond the Facebook social network platform, and into the metaverse — the extension of the internet into three-dimensional virtual reality (VR) spaces.

However, given Facebook’s handling — [or mishandling](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/04/us/politics/cambridge-analytica-scandal-fallout.html) — of their current social responsibilities, we should be cautious about how much control a single company should have over the potential metaverse. We have an opportunity to be proactive regarding the construction of social worlds within virtual reality rather than the reactive state we find ourselves in regarding Meta’s current social products.

As a scholar exploring social interaction within virtual reality spaces, I have concerns about Facebook’s control of the metaverse. We should all be concerned about how Facebook could and will use the data collected within the metaverse.

**Serious concerns**

When Facebook was first developed, it was one of a collection of social network websites viewed to be a frivolous part of social life. Initially, the main function of the site seemed to be that you could keep up with what your college roommate was having for lunch. However, over time, the site evolved to become a place where people could [maintain large swaths of social connections](https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2012.0717), [engage in community groups](https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2009.0003), [access social support](https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819853821) and share [political information (and misinformation)](https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118800319) with a wide networked audience.

Facebook capitalized on a key component of humanity: the social interactions that make up the fabric of our everyday lives. Yet as the site evolved, it became clear that those who were in a position to consider how it might fundamentally change how our society engaged with each other [did not take it seriously](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/6690569.stm), were [treating it as a passing fad](https://www.wired.com/2007/10/three-potential/) and [using it for citizen surveillance](https://www.wired.com/2010/03/undercover-feds-on-facebook/). There was a failure in [managing and regulating the underlying business model of social network sites](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/12/business/congress-facebook-regulation.html).

We are poised to repeat the same mistakes with virtual reality. The current primary application [of virtual reality is games](https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2020/apr/09/game-on-virtual-reality-finally-has-its-killer-app/), which are often not taken seriously by policy-makers except as a scapegoat for violent behaviour. The industry and its consumers can at times seem like a [playground for dilettantes](https://www.wired.com/story/virtual-reality-rich-white-kid-of-technology/).

**Future interactions**

The future [promised by industry leaders](https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820924623) can at times seem like little more than snake oil. Virtual reality represents a way to interact and communicate across geographic locations, in a more embodied manner. The hardware and software problems of virtual reality are continually being met with sophisticated engineered solutions. Virtual reality could be the next big advancement in social interaction. Facebook certainly thinks so.

**Commodity data**

Policy-makers and regulatory bodies stood by as Facebook emerged as a major platform of societal interaction and political speech. They did not enact anti-trust protections as Facebook acquired additional streams of social data through buying [Instagram and WhatsApp](https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-50838013). Now the platform is [deeply entwined](https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/the-networked-relationship/201912/cant-delete-why-we-stay-social-media) in many people’s social lives, and it will be difficult to [untangle society from Facebook](https://warzel.substack.com/p/sowhat-now).

With virtual reality, we still have these opportunities. For the metaverse to truly become a part of daily life, it will need to be accessible without Facebook, or Meta, as a mediator.

Virtual reality can and should be designed for the free and easy movement across virtual spaces, rather than a single company controlling access.

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