**Facebook’s War of Attrition**

*Resistance is possible -- and vital to our digital ecosystem.*

I’m a digital native and a data scientist who studies the relationships between algorithms, inherent bias and privacy, and I have to confess: I hate Facebook.

While this isn’t a hot take or shock to most readers—I think we’re at an inflection point, largely thanks to the lingering social effects of the Coronavirus.

The pandemic has prompted a massive increase in screen time, with most people using social media as a proxy for in-person human interaction. This is a legitimate argument. Social media has facilitated millions of connections during a socially isolated period. Simultaneously, people are starting to recognize that the current digital infrastructure available isn’t effectively serving their needs. As former US Surgeon General Vivek Murthy wrote in the Harvard Business Review, “we live in the most technologically connected age in the history of civilization, yet rates of loneliness have doubled since the 1980s,” flagging mental health as “the next big healthcare pandemic”

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2017/10/04/this-former-surgeon-general-says-theres-a-loneliness-epidemic-and-work-is-partly-to-blame/>

The associations between social media use and rising levels of anxiety, depression, and isolation have been documented in countless articles, documentaries, and robust academic research. Once we’re all vaccinated and mask-free—will we stick to the same social media diet?

<https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/social-media-mental-health-negative-effects-depression-anxiety-addiction-memory-a8307196.html>

<https://www.searchenginejournal.com/social-media-movies/313503/>

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27881357/>

Facebook has become the solution to problems we didn’t know we had. A digital pacifier that calms us while we wait, a humming virtual engine that soothes (or stokes) social anxiety, it serves billions worldwide as a vital communication tool. And it suffers catastrophic data breaches, like the recent leak that compromised the privacy of millions of users.

<http://npr.org/2021/04/09/986005820/after-data-breach-exposes-530-million-facebook-says-it-will-not-notify-users>

Yet the Facebook behemoth persists, relatively unscathed. A decade ago, the nuclear disaster and tsunami at Fukushima prompted global compassion and environmental outrage; a flood of data today, however, provokes far less action and anger. I wonder why.

How many users quit Facebook after watching The Social Dilemma?

<https://www.thesocialdilemma.com/>

After the current data breach? After Cambridge Analytica? I fear that people don’t realize how deeply they’ve embedded their identities into social media expressions – or how savvy marketers and programmers use well-crafted lines of code or deft algorithms to burrow even deeper into our digital lives. Furthermore, even if first world users are becoming cognizant of their usage patterns--Facebook is *wildly popular* abroad, wreaking havoc across fragile democracies.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/18/opinion/facebook-democracy.html>

It kind of feels like the digital version of Operation Condor, only this time it’s being run by a multibillionaire with a monopoly of the biggest communication networks (Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp) known to humanity, on steroids (AI / algorithms).

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Condor>

I may hate my own relationship with Facebook, but I understand its merit and utility. I’ve used it for high school assignments, birthday reminders, and countless facets of daily life. Its political power is unmatched, for good and ill. We all feel guilty about aimlessly “doom-scrolling” – but distractions from real life have their place. More concerning to me is our near-constant monitoring and vigilance of our social channels, which verges on dependence. Too often, it can seem that our digital lives control and dictate our identities in the real world. I’m suggesting we can and should push back a little -- take ownership over your purpose in using the technology, so the tech doesn’t dominate.

I’m trying to reshape my digital habits and move from reflexive use to something more strategic. Here’s what I’ve discovered:

**Delete social apps from your phone** – or put a timer on to limit your use. Becoming aware of how much time you spend staring at the bright rectangle in your hand is the first step. Even if your job requires near-constant social engagement, draw boundaries to divide work hours from the rest of your life, and respect them.

**Clarify your intentions**. We’ve all been there. Your mind is numb, but your thumb is still scrolling strong, scanning the app for a quick dopamine rush. Before opening the app, ask yourself—*why am I doing this*? Do I need a break from work? Am I just killing time in the dentist’s office? Am I nervous in a new social environment? Should I reconnect with Steve? All of these can be legitimate purposes— but if you’re not self-aware, the algorithm spoon feeds you a hot mess of envy.

**Actual connection beats digital connection.** The myth of Facebook and other social platforms is greater connection – when the reality is greater isolation and rising mental health risk, especially among frequent users. So set yourself a challenge: *Facetime > Texting > Commenting > Liking > Scrolling*. Real-world activities are a profound contrast to the myriad tech pings of our workaday lives – and a simple, powerful way to rediscover life’s many pleasures beyond the all-consuming screen. Take a chance on human interaction; resist the habit of isolation that Corona has cultivated.

As Susan Bird, CEO of wf360, noted in her TED talk: “the advent of texting is birth control for conversations”

<https://www.ted.com/talks/susan_bird_conversation_the_new_luxury>

Many assert that government has a role in modifying social-media policy and usage. I’m no Luddite, but I believe that the solution to digital hyper-saturation is up to us, the users, to take advantage of the tools that best serve us, and to limit (or reject entirely) the tools that undermine and work against our goals and mental health. This turning point is an opportunity to disrupt our default habits. I’ve decided to prioritize growing my circle in real life, not racking up superficial connections on social media.

It’s pretty simple, but feels radical. Take a break from your phone. It will still be there when you need it – but you just may “need” it less, and discover solace, connection and motivation in the real, non-digital world.

This post was inspired by a mix of sources, all of which I highly recommend digging deeper into: Digital minimalism, Future Proof, Fs.blog, and a fun nyker article, and a CGP Grey video on phones.

<https://www.amazon.com/Future-Proof-Reinventing-Work-Acceleration-ebook/dp/B07MC78G3Z>

<https://www.amazon.com/Digital-Minimalism-Choosing-Focused-Noisy-ebook/dp/B07DBRBP7G>

<https://fs.blog/>

<https://www.newyorker.com/news/letter-from-silicon-valley/in-the-clubhouse>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-ZpsxnmmbE&ab_channel=CGPGrey>

Linkedin

I’ve resurrected my blog from the depths of grad school. Read my new post, which considers the effects of social media during Covid isolation, including the recent Facebook breach and the broader digital ecosystem.

Read my new post, which how a year of Covid isolation reshaped my perspective on social media, including the recent Facebook data breach and the broader digital ecosystem.

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Insta

Hey

Are you afraid of your declining mental heath on this app?

Have I seemed distant or reluctant to engage with you on this app?

Have you seen the social dilemma but don’t know what to do with yourself?

Read my blog post if you’re curious (link in bio)

New bio on website

Hi! I’m a data scientist at nference.ai, where I work on all sorts of fun projects around healthcare and artificial intelligence. I previously studied at Macaulay and Harvard, focusing on biochemistry and data science.

Questions? Interesting ideas to share? Drop me a line.

Thanks for reading!

Add David hachuel telegram project around covid to projects tab

**fb blog posts**

bernays smoking vs facebook. environment that you can’t escape. we know smoking kills. New cigarette is an iPhone. It wasn’t about selling as it was about re-organizing society to make Facebook Park human life. He linked Facebook activity with social activity to interact with the website post to be social powerful and well liked. F

Facebook was held as communication democracy built out of freedom to express yourself. He normalized it and made it desirable one line of code. Mark didn’t try to create the best adventure structure of the world invert the problem and thought about the world if it looked like any person go anywhere and try to make that all the reality. at the same time technology is extremely powerful texting over Wi-Fi sharing images of his peers and being able to aggregate online before obviously.

As a data scientist have you this as an infrastructure that has fallen apart. People of moved away from newsfeeds at least in the US and have migrated towards video Audio. mention New Yorker clubhouse or mention Cal Newport book mention thinking about the first book.

what if the water company was designed for you to have showers five times a day you’ll be extra clean and maybe even healthy. of course this would be massively destructive to moment and eventual mental health but if A commodity work to normalize your behavior groupthink as often default.

even as a data scientist who study privacy equity algorithm bias I am disheartened the recent leak of data across hundreds of thousands millions of users is the equivalent of a damn breaking or A nuclear fallout similar to The nuclear disaster in fukushima. we should be outraged terrified and demand equity. Instead we’re stuck smoking away with our infinite srolls infinite lakes and sutble but constant constant mental health malaise.

it’s obvious that Facebook is a double edge sword like any other or weapon depends on how you use it. As a kid, I lacked critical thinking skills to even second guess why I posted outdated memes from the early 2000s. As a high schooler, it was the equivalent of haning out at the mall and seeing whos wearing the coolest clothing. I’d have to use it in college to check in for group projects or see what activies are on campus.

I’d like to use Facebook/instagram as a way to Chronicle my travels. and posting I hope to evoke feelings of inspiration or courage to travel rather than jealousy lavish lifestyle and privileges provided as well white-collar worker from New York. but I can’t control that.

The scariest part to me is that when people are realizing/aware the severity and depth of situation they do not change behavior. How many Facebook accounts were deleted after the social network streamed on Netflix? People became more conscious aware and outraged by the situation but the hamster wheel of algorithmic advertising is still running.

which straw will break the camel’s back? is it Cambridge analyticala, is it just recent data breach that will not notifiy milliions od users, is it I think I’ll the rock solid scientific evidence that depression and anxiety is on the rise for adolecents exposed to the to these tools being dictated by our lives. i’d talk to you that Strauss camper a camels back in the situation. Itinstead of water those homes are filled billions of dollars and that ship has sailed. i’m disheartened frightened for future generations to come.

i’m grateful that certain companies like Apple Google I’ve taken steps to remove third-party cookies and location tracking but infrastructure it’s already in place. I encourage these readers to really second-guess why you are using the platform. There’s nothing wrong with connecting on social media—in fact it’s proven to be improving mood during the pandemic.

The most teryfiying part of this whole situation isthat our decsions are permanent. Once you like something, post something, or comment anything, you’re data is essentially permanently stored on a server somewhere. We’ve all had embarrassing photos from middle school or deleted some compromising college photos before looking for a first job. I get it, mistakes can be made. But we should learn from them instead of resulting to the same behavior for the rest of our lives.

Cal Newport makes the astute judgement that we’re loosing our lesure time. In the 1800’s leasure was. I’d argue that even though we’ve made astonishing technological progress in the last decade, we’ve regressed socially. A boy growing up in the 1800s may have to work in a coal mine, but when/if she gets off work, you’ll be damned if he would start walking though town looking for peoples approval or social stimuli. He’d try to relax. he might pick up a hobby. He might even do something that scared him. A girl growing up New Amsterdam in the 1600s would probably fancy a walk around town or practice sewing, knitting, or masonry.

Not even a cigarrete as much as a pacifier. It makes us content for brief setragenourci spurts. We feel connected, even though were not.

At the end of the day—this is a first world problem with global health ramifiactions. We have repeatedly seen the evicede of democracies destructed, and own fragile political ecosystem torn to shreds.

One final thought is that even though I’ve come to hate my relationship with facebook, I understand its merit and utlity. You shouldn’t feel guilty about aimlessly scrolling after work to a certain extent. Pacifiers can be great on airplanes, but constant exposure can lead to all sorts of dental malformations. Replace salami with social media and I think cats can have a little salami (sorry warren). We’ve all heard the adage repeated over generations “too much of a good thing is a bad thing.” But is this a good thing for you? Push back a little. Take ownership over your intentions in using the technology.

Images and links

Pacifier / Cigarette/ Hamster wheel

Cats can have a little salami

Tubes of internet senator