

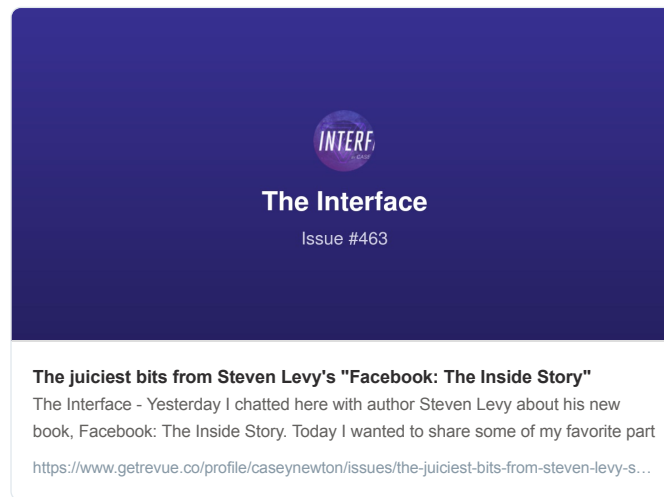


**Casey Newton** @CaseyNewton

27 Feb · 8 tweets · [CaseyNewton/status/1232834682087043072](https://twitter.com/CaseyNewton/status/1232834682087043072)



OK, here's a short thread of my favorite takeaways from [@StevenLevy](#)'s new book on Facebook. One, the company's series of scandals over the past several years can be traced to this fateful decision



**What is the single most consequential decision that Facebook ever made?**

When Zuckerberg hired Sheryl Sandberg to be his chief operating officer, he delegated to her the subjects he was least interested in. That included policy, which he saw as distinct from the product organization. In fact, product and policy are two sides of the same coin — you can't successfully manage one without paying close attention to the other. Much of the reckoning of the past three-plus years can be traced to delegating policy operations to Sandberg, while the company's all-powerful growth team — which reported to Zuckerberg — ran roughshod over everything else. Policy has always lagged behind the messes created by the growth team, and this was by organizational design.

Two, Chamath says dark profiles are real!

**Facebook has long denied the existence of “dark” or “shadow” profiles — essentially, landing pages for people who have yet to create accounts, but are pre-populated with information about their friends and other data. What did the former leader of the growth team, Chamath Palihapitiya, have to say about these profiles?**

From page 222:

*“Palihapitiya now indicates that dark profiles did exist, and the growth team took advantage of them. He says that Facebook would take out search ads on Google using the names of Facebook holdouts as keywords. The ads would link, he says, to those dark profiles of nonusers that supposedly to not exist. “You would search for your own name on the internet and you’d land on a dark profile on Facebook,” he says. “And then you’d be like well, fuck it, you’d fill it in and then ... we would show you a bunch of your friends.”*

Three, the Facebook phone was an insane fever dream that could only be used by right-handed people

**What can you tell us about the Facebook phone prototype that it produced?**

Its codename was GFK, after the Wu-Tang Clan’s Ghostface Killah. Facebook denied building a phone to its own workers. (“It was the first time I recall Facebook lying internally” — Callahan.) The phone was designed by Yves Behar and had “an unusual groove in the curved surface, where one could scroll using a thumb.” The processor was built by Intel, which also offered “an innovative touch sensor that would both unlock the phone and scroll in a single movement.” The touch sensor only worked for right-handed people, but Facebook proceeded with it anyway. (“We decided we didn’t care about left-handed people,” an anonymous worker tells Levy.)

Four, this is just a very funny email

**What is the funniest email sent in the history of the company?**

Of the ones presented here, I’d have to go with the note Zuckerberg sent Evan Spiegel after Spiegel spurned an acquisition offer and Facebook built its first app to compete directly with Snapchat. “I hope you enjoy Poke,” the email from Zuckerberg read in its entirety. (It’s funny because no one enjoyed using Poke.)

Five, this is the best Marissa Mayer story I have heard in years

**How did Google screw up its attempt to buy WhatsApp?**

Page 322: “In 2012, the executive making the pitch was Marissa Mayer. But [WhatsApp co-founders] [Jan] Koum and [Brian] Acton didn’t find it encouraging that when they came to Google’s Mountain View offices for the meeting, Mayer’s participation was video-conferenced, even though she was somewhere else on the actual campus.”

Six, if you think Facebook ignored its safety responsibilities, you should hear the

WhatsApp guys talk

**How seriously did WhatsApp's founders take the finding that their product is being used to promote hate speech, lynch mobs, and other societal harms?**

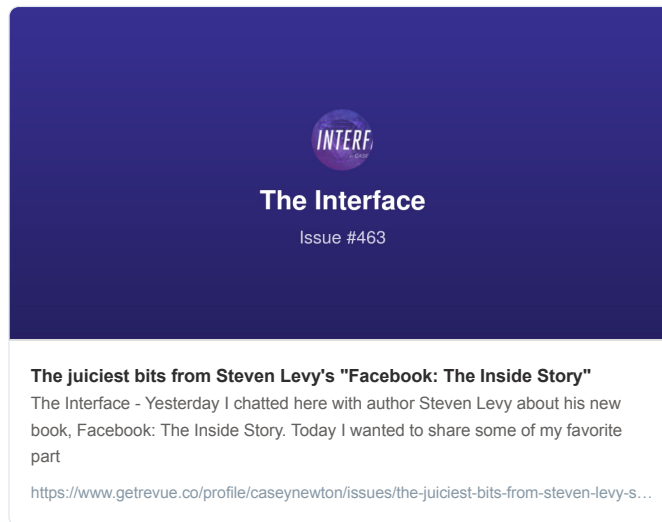
Apparently not at all. "There is no morality attached to technology, it's people that attach morality to technology," Brian Acton tells Levy. "It's not up to technologists to be the ones to render judgment. I don't like being a nanny company. Insofar as people use a product in India or Myanmar or anywhere for hate crimes or terrorism or anything else, let's stop looking at the technology and start asking questions about the people."

Seven, is Mark Zuckerberg having fun?

**Is Zuckerberg having any fun?**

"I don't optimize for fun," he says on page 463.

All this and more in today's edition of the newsletter. And I'll probably wind up writing five more columns based on this book because there's so much food for thought in it. Thank you [@StevenLevy](#)!



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