

Facebook changed its parent company name to "Meta" on Thursday as the tech giant tries to move past being a scandal-plagued social network to its virtual reality vision for the future.

The new handle comes as the company battles to fend off one of its worst crises yet and pivot to its ambitions for the "metaverse," which would blur the lines between the physical world and the digital one.

Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp -- which are used by billions around the world -- will keep their names under the rebranding critics have called an effort to distract from the platform's dysfunction.

"We've learned a lot from struggling with social issues and living under closed platforms, and now it is time to take everything that we've learned and help build the next chapter," CEO Mark Zuckerberg said during an annual developers conference.

"I am proud to announce that starting today, our company is now Meta. Our mission remains the same, still about bringing people together, our apps and their brands, they're not changing," he added.

The company's critics pounced on the rebranding, with an activist group calling itself The Real Facebook Oversight Board saying the platform is harming democracy while spreading disinformation and hate.