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The Future of Facebook

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6-7 minutes

The past few days have been rough for Facebook. Some are deleting their account in protest of the Cambridge Analytica scandal. Some are decrying the death of social media, likening it to sugar or smoking. I believe much of the negative uproar is caused by a deceptively simple issue: Facebook just isn't fun to use anymore. You *think* it'll be interesting every time you open it, but you leave somewhat dissatisfied.

This is because Facebook's organization is built to optimize metrics and we don't have the technology to measure the right thing. We can't measure joy. Instead we track engagement, which leads to a bland product over time. Instagram and YouTube are getting far less flak because they're more entertaining. Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos get more PR leeway because their products are awesome. If Mark Zuckerberg wants to fix Facebook, he doesn't need to become more empathetic or a better public speaker. He needs to MAFFA: Make Facebook Fun Again.

If he doesn't he'll lose to an emergent trend of companies trying to capitalize on the boringness of Facebook. Many of these new companies aren't building a social network *per se*. Instead, they're marrying social networking concepts to a particular domain.

Fundamentally, social networking is the new database — a commodity you can attach to different media properties and verticals to create interesting products. Online socializing won't go away. Instead, Facebook's attention capture will unbundle into different companies. Here are some examples:

Media 2.0

Many of these companies in this category are fundamentally media properties. Unlike the incumbents, they're aren't just about content. They're going to use the building blocks of social networking software (like a SaaS company would use a database) to build real community.

Peloton. The unicorn fitness company has built a decentralized SoulCycle community. Riders have messianic levels of admiration of the instructors, and it has an incredibly active and supportive [community](#) (on FB Groups today, but could easily be ported without any loss of retention).

Tingles. ASMR is a genre of videos designed to trigger positive, euphoric feelings. 20 million people regularly watch ASMR videos to relax. Tingles is building a Netflix for ASMR, since YouTube isn't optimized for it.

HQ Trivia. A live game show merged with an app. Once you try it out, you realize this is what all TV should morph into over time.

Caffeine. Caffeine is like [Twitch](#), on steroids. It makes it very easy for anyone to broadcast the video game they're playing. It wouldn't surprise me if they broadened over time to other domains. The Internet is very asynchronous today. Given the growth in mobile presence, synchronous (live) experiences become interesting again.

NewTV. Meg Whitman (ex CEO HP) and Jeremy Katzenberg (ex Chairman of Disney) are starting a "Hollywood-style, short-form videos for mobile use". Netflix, but only for short form videos.

Anchor. Anchor makes it really easy for anyone to start a podcast, and it has a lot of unique material as a result. Podcasts are on the rise. It may be the death of radio, Airpods removing [hidden friction](#) or a thousand other reasons, but I still believe there's lot of room for growth in this area.

Messaging

Much of Facebook's unbundling will go into messaging groups and apps. A sort of anti-globalization of the digital world. Those who deleted their Facebook account will probably just start using WhatsApp more. There are some other platforms worth noting:

Telegram. The messaging app has developed a strong following in both Russia and the cryptocurrency community. It's probably the closest thing I've seen to a second coming of IRC — many active large chat rooms. Like IRC, it suffers from a discoverability problem: there's no great way to find new channels. I presume that will get fixed over time.

Discord. What started as a gaming chat service has become consumer Slack, for different Reddit communities. Like Telegram, the discovery of new channels isn't great but the community has built a [directory](#).

Houseparty. Houseparty is a group FaceTime app that's gone through several waves of popularity. It suffers from the "chin problem" all mobile video conferencing has: you'd never take a photo of your face from below, but that's the perspective you hold the phone in when you use it. I suspect this problem is solvable through clever use of technology.

Looks Familiar

Vero. A Instagram alternative that topped 3 million downloads recently. The growth stemmed from frustration with Instagram's non-chronological feed. Since then it's founder Ayman Hariri has come [under scrutiny](#), and I'd imagine retention has been tough. More interesting than Vero itself is the phenomenon. It's rapid ascension shows that people are hungry to explore something new.

Mastodon.social. Much like Vero was a reaction to Instagram, Mastodon is an open-source alternative to Twitter. It's [tripled](#) users in the past year. In addition to diverging from Twitter's features, it also enables the creation of private communities, which I suspect will be a key component of the future.

Musical.ly. A popular lip-syncing app that was acquired by Toutiao for a reported \$1 billion. When you try it out you'll find a plethora of creative and funny videos, like the early days of YouTube.

Reddit. Reddit isn't new, but it's hard not to mention. What makes for a great online community is a shared passion. Reddit is home to many of these, like [/r/Keto](#), [/r/LegalAdvice](#) or [/r/askscience](#).

YouTube. YouTube videos used to be links you found on Facebook. In 2012, everything changed. YouTube made [a small tweak](#) to its recommendation system. Watch time on YouTube grew 50 percent a year for the next three years. YouTube became a real destination. And it's only getting started. Over time I believe YouTube will become the most important Google property, surpassing search.