

# Facebook Disables Access for NYU Research Into Political-Ad Targeting

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-cuts-off-access-for-nyu-research-into-political-ad-targeting-11628052204?st=pr7yymasqzw6lrw&reflink=desktopwebshare\\_permalink](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-cuts-off-access-for-nyu-research-into-political-ad-targeting-11628052204?st=pr7yymasqzw6lrw&reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink)

Updated Aug. 4, 2021 at 5:54 pm ET

- Facebook Inc. disabled a New York University research project's accounts and access to the platform, effectively shutting down a study of the social-media giant's targeting of political ads.
- The NYU Ad Observatory, launched last September by the university's engineering school, recruited more than 6,500 volunteers to use a special browser extension to collect data about the political ads Facebook shows them.
- Soon after, Facebook, which hadn't given permission for the project, demanded the researchers cease collecting the data.
- On Tuesday, Facebook disabled the accounts, apps, Facebook pages and platform access associated with the project and its operators. "
- NYU's Ad Observatory project studied political ads using unauthorized means to access and collect data from Facebook, in violation of our Terms of Service," Mike Clark, Facebook's product management director, said in a statement posted to the company's website Tuesday.
- Two other researchers also had their accounts suspended, a Facebook representative said. "
- Amid a wave of criticism about the opaque nature of political advertising in the 2016 presidential campaign, Facebook launched an archive of advertisements that runs on its platform, with information such as who paid for an ad, when it ran and the geographic location of people who saw it.
- That library excludes information about the targeting that determines who sees the ads.
- Facebook's action Tuesday drew fire from Democrat Senator Mark R. Warner of Virginia, a longtime critic of the company.
- The social-media platform last month was in the White House's crosshairs for vaccine misinformation.

## ★● Facebook Hit With New Antitrust Suit From Federal Trade Commission

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-hit-with-renewed-antitrust-lawsuit-as-ftc-tries-again-11629387483?st=ohboaa0w01354zg&reflink=desktopwebshare\\_permalink](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-hit-with-renewed-antitrust-lawsuit-as-ftc-tries-again-11629387483?st=ohboaa0w01354zg&reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink)

Updated Aug. 19, 2021 at 4:37 pm ET

- The Federal Trade Commission filed a new version of its antitrust lawsuit against Facebook Inc. on Thursday, seeking to jump-start its case with bolstered allegations that the company is abusing a monopoly position in social media.
- The FTC voted 3-2 along party lines to file the amended lawsuit, with Chairwoman Lina Khan participating in the agency's deliberations and supporting the new complaint.
- The FTC's amended complaint comes after a federal judge in June dismissed the agency's original lawsuit, saying it didn't make sufficient allegations to support claims that Facebook engaged in unlawful monopolization.
- The FTC's core allegations remain the same as its original complaint from December: that Facebook unlawfully sought to suppress competition by buying up potential rivals such as the messaging platform WhatsApp and image-sharing app Instagram.
- If the commission's new lawsuit survives a likely motion by Facebook to dismiss the case, a yearslong legal battle could ensue with broad ramifications for the tech giant's future, and for the FTC's powers to restrain dominant companies.
- Among its new arguments, the FTC said several statistical metrics, including daily and monthly user data, showed that Facebook held a monopoly in personal social-networking services.
- The FTC said that Snap Inc.'s Snapchat was Facebook's closest competitor but remains only a fraction of its size.

- startup called EyeGroove—which allowed users to create and share music videos with augmented-reality effects—the tech giant moved quickly to acquire the app in 2016 and then shut it down.
- In seeking Ms. Khan's recusal, Facebook had argued that she couldn't be impartial based on her past work as an academic and congressional staffer in which she argued that big tech companies should be reined in.
- A group of 46 states also sued Facebook in December 2020 alongside the FTC, but Judge Boasberg threw out the states' case in June.

## ★● Facebook's Investors Are the Biggest Addicts

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-investors-are-the-biggest-addicts-11631880000?st=rtsl6lwk0ijbxpe&reflink=desktopwebshare\\_permalink](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-investors-are-the-biggest-addicts-11631880000?st=rtsl6lwk0ijbxpe&reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink)

Sept. 17, 2021 at 8:00 am ET

- The Journal's investigation found that the social-media giant knows its platforms—which are now used by nearly half the world's population—cause users harm, often in ways only the company fully understands.
- Some of the evidence was particularly troubling: Facebook's internal research showed that, among teens who reported suicidal thoughts, 13% of British users and 6% of American users traced the desire to kill themselves to Instagram, according to the Journal's report.
- Yet investors seemed to largely gloss over the disturbing revelations: As of Thursday's market close, Facebook's stock had lost less than 1.5% of its value this week.
- The Journal this week reported on evidence that teens often find Instagram particularly addictive—a conclusion that would hardly surprise anyone who is regularly on it.
- Facebook's platforms are designed to be habit-forming.
- But Wall Street estimates that by the end of the third quarter, Facebook will have added 185 million monthly users since the firm's Netflix release last September.
- The hard truth—and what Facebook's investors already know—is that is exactly the kind of stuff that keeps users engaged.
- Survey data from Cowen suggest competitor TikTok's penetration among people aged 18-24 has surged from 42% in the second quarter of 2020 to 56% in the third quarter of 2021.
- More broadly, Facebook is now looking to transition from a social-media company into what it calls a "metaverse" company, building a kind of virtual forum for users to work, play and buy things.
- Already Facebook has had to delay some growth plans because of a lack of trust.

## ★● Facebook Oversight Board Launches Review of Company's XCheck System

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-oversight-board-launches-review-of-companys-xcheck-system-11632246934?st=4qeyi5jxpmkc9m8&reflink=desktopwebshare\\_permalink](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-oversight-board-launches-review-of-companys-xcheck-system-11632246934?st=4qeyi5jxpmkc9m8&reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink)

Updated Sept. 21, 2021 at 5:31 pm ET

- Facebook Inc.'s Oversight Board said it is reviewing the company's practice of holding high-profile users to separate sets of rules, citing apparent inconsistencies in the way the social-media giant makes decisions.
- The inquiry follows an investigation by The Wall Street Journal into the system, known internally as "cross-check" or "XCheck."
- A 2019 internal Facebook review found that the practice of whitelisting was "not publicly defensible."
- In a separate post on Tuesday, the company highlighted that it now has 40,000 employees working on safety and security, and that it invested more than \$13 billion in these areas since 2016. "
- Separately, Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D., Conn.) said Tuesday that lawmakers are seeking a high-ranking representative of Facebook to testify at a Sept. 30 hearing, in part to respond to the Journal's reporting on the company's internal research about the effects of Instagram on teen girls. "
- The simple fact of the matter is that Facebook has known for years that Instagram is directly involved in an increase in eating disorders, mental-health issues, and suicidal thoughts, especially for teenage girls,"

Mr. Blumenthal said at a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on privacy and antitrust issues, adding that he felt Facebook had misled Congress in previous statements about the impact of its platforms on mental health.

- The criticism of Facebook at Tuesday's hearing was bipartisan.
- Sen. Mike Lee (R., Utah) said he felt the Journal's reporting showed Facebook lacked competition. "
- Mr. Satterfield said Facebook faces intense competition.
- The Oversight Board, in its blog post, said it planned to release details on what it heard from Facebook in October as part of its quarterly transparency report. "

## ★ I Changed My Mind—Facebook Is a Monopoly

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-is-monopoly-metaverse-users-advertising-platforms-competition-mewe-big-tech-11633104247?st=f9enj0iepep0v86&reflink=desktopwebshare\\_permalink](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-is-monopoly-metaverse-users-advertising-platforms-competition-mewe-big-tech-11633104247?st=f9enj0iepep0v86&reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink)

Oct. 1, 2021 at 2:05 pm ET

- I'm the founder of MeWe, the ad-free social network with data privacy and no content amplification or newsfeed manipulation.
- MeWe competes directly with Facebook.
- Facebook has responded by denying that it's a monopolist and calling the FTC's lawsuit "meritless."
- Two years ago the platform had five million users and no revenue.
- Yet despite MeWe's growth, Facebook's troubling actions over the last two years have caused me to change my position, for six reasons.
- Facebook has collaborated with hundreds of major news outlets world-wide and pays many of them for their content.
- Facebook could refuse to renew its payment agreements or suppress the reach and distribution of those news outlets if their content includes articles that are unfavorable toward it.
- According to Pew Research, approximately one-third of Americans get their news from Facebook.
- Fifth, the glue that holds it all together is Facebook's monopoly over data.
- Its ownership and control of the personal information of Facebook users and nonusers alike is unmatched.
- Facebook's data troves give it unrivaled knowledge about people, governments—and its competitors.
- Facebook is a monopoly like the world has never seen.
- It has more power to influence, manipulate and change thoughts, opinions, votes and purchase decisions on a global scale than any nation or government.
- Decoupling Facebook from Instagram, WhatsApp and other apps it owns is unlikely to be sufficient.
- More privacy laws and regulations are unlikely to solve the problems either.
- Competition is needed more than ever to rein in Facebook's domination over social media, news, personal data and democracy.

## ★ Facebook's Trials Aren't Everyone's Tribulations

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-trials-arent-everyones-tribulations-11633183200?st=uzoda085ibp3es&reflink=desktopwebshare\\_permalink](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-trials-arent-everyones-tribulations-11633183200?st=uzoda085ibp3es&reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink)

Oct. 2, 2021 at 10:00 am ET

- In response to a Wall Street Journal investigation earlier this month that revealed Facebook's own research showed its Instagram app had negative impacts on many teens' mental health, the social-media giant published annotated versions of some of that research this week, pointing out that its platform has also had a lot of positive effects on teens.
- Yet copies of Facebook's research published by the Journal suggest even the company has reason to believe that Instagram is disproportionately prone to cause emotional distress in teens relative to other social-media platforms.
- In a blog post reacting to the Journal articles, Facebook's head of research, Pratiti Raychoudhury, argued that the Journal's reporting mischaracterized the company's findings about Instagram and teens, while a Wall Street Journal spokesman said the paper stands behind its reporting.

- One specific Facebook slide deck published by the Journal suggests that social-media apps' contribution to social comparisons is based on perceived reality and formality, concluding that Instagram has a high degree of both—a combination that is unique to the platform.
- The deck labels video-sharing platforms YouTube and TikTok as less formal, while labeling Snapchat as having low perceived reality and low formality, all leading to less relative social comparison.
- The same slide deck suggests that Instagram has a particularly big impact on teens' notions about their appearance compared with competitors including TikTok, VSCO and Snapchat.
- In contrast, the deck states that TikTok is grounded in dance and fun, while Snapchat is "sheltered by the element of fun that keeps focus on the face rather than the body."
- The risk for Facebook is that any new regulations will be tailored to it specifically, or that it becomes a particular target for enforcement of even broad regulations following all the negative publicity around the company.
- Since the launch of The Wall Street Journal's investigative series on Facebook on Sept. 13, Facebook shares are down around 9%.

## ★● Facebook Needs to Empower Parents, Not Censor Political Speech

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-in-the-dock-congress-frances-haugen-mark-zuckerberg-11633471560?st=z6vmm7yy3gi23ih&reflink=desktopwebshare\\_permalink](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-in-the-dock-congress-frances-haugen-mark-zuckerberg-11633471560?st=z6vmm7yy3gi23ih&reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink)

Oct. 5, 2021 at 6:58 pm ET

- Both were on display Tuesday as Frances Haugen, the former employee who leaked the documents, testified on Capitol Hill.
- One of her legitimate concerns is Facebook's negative influence on the mental health of teenagers.
- Ms. Haugen's documents show that Facebook understands its impact on teens but has done little about it.
- One in five U.S. teens said Instagram made them feel worse while 42% said it made them feel better. "
- Section 230 liability protection for algorithms or requiring Facebook to submit its algorithms to regulators for review.
- Just what we need—a Bureau of Algorithms.
- A better idea is to give users more control over their news feeds and parents more control over what their kids are exposed to online.
- Too bad the main concern of many politicians is prodding Facebook to censor "misinformation."
- But the company has also become a political scapegoat for the deeper-seated cultural problems that its platform can amplify.
- Congress ought to be examining ways to empower social-media users and parents, rather than bullying Facebook to exercise more control over user speech.

## ★● Facebook Slows New Products for 'Reputational Reviews'

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-slows-new-products-for-reputational-reviews-11633535983?st=7fmz2iq45zfng3k&reflink=desktopwebshare\\_permalink](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-slows-new-products-for-reputational-reviews-11633535983?st=7fmz2iq45zfng3k&reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink)

Updated Oct. 6, 2021 at 5:21 pm ET

- Facebook Inc. has delayed the rollout of new products in recent days, people familiar with the matter said, amid media reports and congressional hearings related to a trove of internal documents showing harms from its platforms.
- Executives at the social-media company also have put a hold on some work on new and existing products while more than a dozen people are involved in conducting "reputational reviews" to examine how Facebook may be criticized and to ensure products don't adversely impact children, the people said.

- In a Facebook post on Tuesday, Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg said he has asked leaders to do deep dives on work across the company over the next few days and committed to continuing research into the company's products. "
- This follows Facebook's announcement last week that it would pause plans for its Instagram Kids product after lawmakers and others voiced concerns about the photo-sharing platform's effects on young people's mental health.
- Facebook has been tightening the reins on what information is shared internally over the past few weeks, the people said.
- A team within the company is examining all in-house research that could potentially damage Facebook's image if made public, some of the people said.
- There have been two congressional hearings since the Journal's series published last month, including one on Tuesday by the Senate consumer protection subcommittee.
- Facebook executives have discussed the possibility of suing Ms. Haugen to allege she stole company documents, people familiar with the talks said.
- Facebook's global head of safety, Antigone Davis, told senators last week that her company wouldn't retaliate against the individual for providing Congress with internal company research, but didn't address any further possible action.
- Inside Facebook, many data scientists and internal researchers say the company should release more documents and research.
- Facebook policy executives have also been trying to gauge and influence lawmakers' perspective of the company, both ahead of and after the recent hearings, congressional aides said.
- Facebook executives recently reached out to congressional aides to further detail the company's decision to pause Instagram Kids, and reiterated that the product was conceived to address the issue of children getting phones at younger ages, according to a document described to the Journal.
- Some senators said they would be writing letters to Facebook, demanding more information.
- Congressional aides said they expected lawmakers to call other executives for additional hearings on the matter and that they may subpoena documents from the company.

## ★ Facebook's Would-Be Regulators Are Between a Rock and a Hard Place

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-would-be-regulators-are-between-a-rock-and-a-hard-place-11633690802?st=nf7wiy4r356kbpu&reflink=desktopwebshare\\_permalink](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-would-be-regulators-are-between-a-rock-and-a-hard-place-11633690802?st=nf7wiy4r356kbpu&reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink)

Oct. 8, 2021 at 7:00 am ET

- U.S. senators seem focused on regulating Facebook to protect its platforms' youngest users, but there is no clear solution in sight.
- Following a Wall Street Journal investigation last month that showed Facebook was aware that its Instagram app can cause some teen users harm, senators have convened twice in two weeks, in part to better understand how to protect youths on Instagram.
- They are key to Facebook's growth, but they might be resistant to new controls.
- According to Facebook's internal research published by the Journal, children ages 10 through 12 seem to view getting parents' approval to engage on kids' apps as embarrassing.
- For instance, Mr. Mosseri has said part of the reason Facebook had been building Instagram Kids was to get young children lying about their age off Instagram and onto a platform that would be safer for them.
- A Journal article last week said Facebook had removed more than 600,000 accounts in the past three months for violating its rules on age limits, citing Mr. Mosseri.
- Facebook's research published by the Journal shows that Instagram's saturation rate among teens is more than 100% in at least four countries, including 132% in Britain.
- Last week Facebook said it would pause its Instagram Kids project.
- research published by the Journal also shows the company has researched pre-tween categories, with one presentation showing Facebook had even wondered if there might be a way to engage children during playdates.

- Facebook's shares have fallen more than 13% since the Journal began publishing its series of investigations on the company Sept. 13.
- While Facebook's business has been untouched by new legislation despite a yearslong history of data and privacy leaks and public-relations gaffes, some investors are clearly starting to think this time is different.
- But any new regulations would have to be carefully designed.
- After chiding Facebook for its "move fast and break things" motto, the last thing regulators want is to do the same thing.

## Facebook Settles With U.S. Government Over Improperly Reserving Jobs for Immigrants

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-settles-with-u-s-government-over-improperly-reserving-jobs-for-immigrants-11634662305?st=1xra15va203o71y&reflink=desktopwebshare\\_permalink](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-settles-with-u-s-government-over-improperly-reserving-jobs-for-immigrants-11634662305?st=1xra15va203o71y&reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink)

Updated Oct. 19, 2021 at 2:24 pm ET

- Facebook Inc. has agreed to pay a financial penalty as part of settlements with the U.S. government that had accused the social-media company of illegally reserving lucrative jobs for immigrant workers it was sponsoring for permanent residence instead of searching for and considering available U.S. workers.
- Facebook will pay \$4.75 million to the U.S. government and as much as \$9.5 million to eligible victims of the alleged discrimination, the Justice Department said, in what it called the largest fine and financial award its civil-rights division has ever made.
- Also, as part of the settlement, the Labor Department will look into Facebook's current program to help obtain applications for foreign workers and any future filed ones for the next three years.
- U.S. immigration laws set strict requirements for companies looking to apply for green cards on behalf of their employees.
- Companies aren't specifically required to post a job opening on their websites.
- If a qualified American worker comes forward, the company is required to interview that person, and the green-card application process can't move forward.
- The lawsuit alleged that, though Facebook followed all the advertising and recruiting requirements for these jobs, it didn't publicize the openings as extensively as it normally would.
- Facebook didn't advertise the positions on its website, and required candidates to mail in their applications rather than accepting them online, the suit said.

## ★● Facebook Fined \$70 Million in U.K. Over Giphy Merger Breach

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-fined-70-million-in-u-k-over-giphy-merger-breach-11634737374?st=2h7jesc7dgyqzxsx&reflink=desktopwebshare\\_permalink](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-fined-70-million-in-u-k-over-giphy-merger-breach-11634737374?st=2h7jesc7dgyqzxsx&reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink)

Oct. 20, 2021 at 9:42 am ET

- The U.K.'s competition regulator fined Facebook Inc. 50.5 million British pounds, equivalent to \$69.6 million, alleging it breached reporting requirements during a continuing review of its proposed takeover of Giphy, a provider of animated images for use in social media.
- The CMA said that it had given Facebook multiple warnings to provide the required information, and that it believes the company's "failure to comply was deliberate." "
- Facebook described the allegation of a deliberate failure as a mischaracterization.
- Facebook bought Giphy in May 2020, paying \$315 million, according to documents published as part of the CMA's merger review.
- The CMA said Wednesday that it is still reviewing the Giphy deal.
- In August, it warned that it could require Facebook to unwind the deal after provisionally finding that it would harm competition.
- When Facebook bought Giphy last year, the company said it planned to integrate it into Instagram and other apps.



- The CMA fine comes as tech companies face growing regulatory scrutiny.

## ★ Facebook Is Rebuked by Oversight Board Over Transparency on Treatment of Prominent Users

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebooks-oversight-board-says-company-wasnt-fully-forthcoming-on-treatment-of-high-profile-users-11634817601?st=pgecpu1tqh8c9w4&reflink=desktopwebshare\\_permalink](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebooks-oversight-board-says-company-wasnt-fully-forthcoming-on-treatment-of-high-profile-users-11634817601?st=pgecpu1tqh8c9w4&reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink)

Updated Oct. 21, 2021 at 12:09 pm ET

- Facebook Inc.'s oversight board said the company hadn't been forthcoming about how it exempts high-profile users from its rules and said it is drafting recommendations for how to overhaul the system, following a Wall Street Journal investigation into the practice.
- The board, which Facebook created to provide guidance about the company's enforcement systems and make binding decisions about specific enforcement actions, said the company had failed to mention XCheck when it referred its decision to ban former President Donald Trump from the platform to the board this spring.
- A 2019 internal Facebook review found that the practice of whitelisting was "not publicly defensible," according to documents viewed by the Journal. "
- The oversight board says it soon plans to launch a public consultation with civil society and others about how Facebook should overhaul the XCheck system.
- In its report, the board said the company had disclosed that it conducts an average of fewer than 10,000 XCheck content reviews a day.
- The company also told the board that it now reviews 84% of the content produced by entities in the XCheck system.
- Facebook says the board's content decisions are binding and it has committed to publicly respond to the board's recommendations within 30 days.
- It was funded by Facebook and has no enforcement powers.
- I think the board has the power it requires," said Thomas Hughes, director of the oversight board administration.
- He noted that Facebook has followed many of the board's recommendations this year, such as translating its community standards into Punjabi and clarifying how it handles satirical content.
- The oversight board made its first decisions in January, overturning some content removals, and Facebook expanded its purview in April to also consider user appeals of content moderators' decisions not to remove specific posts or other content.
- The panel also objected in May to Facebook's decision to indefinitely ban Mr. Trump with no criteria for restoration, calling it "a vague, standardless penalty."

## ★ Australia Considers New Privacy Rules to Protect Children on Social Media

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/australia-considers-new-privacy-rules-to-protect-children-on-social-media-11635162809?st=owe5jg5ex69a8ba&reflink=desktopwebshare\\_permalink](https://www.wsj.com/articles/australia-considers-new-privacy-rules-to-protect-children-on-social-media-11635162809?st=owe5jg5ex69a8ba&reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink)

Oct. 25, 2021 at 7:53 am ET

- Australia is considering new data-privacy rules that could make it illegal for social-media companies to direct children to harmful content, the latest move by lawmakers around the world to address concerns about the impact of online platforms on young people's mental health.
- The legislation is expected to be introduced in Australia's parliament early next year, one government official said.
- Australia's privacy regulator would investigate possible breaches of the new rules and companies could be fined 10% of their annual Australian revenue for serious violations, an amount that could be tens of millions of dollars for tech giants.
- But the strictest rules, such as the 16-year-old age limit, would apply only to platforms in the social-media category.

- internal research had found Instagram, which is owned by Facebook, is harmful for a sizable percentage of young users, particularly teenage girls with body-image concerns.
- Facebook has since suspended plans for a version of its Instagram app tailored to children and faced tough questions from U.S. lawmakers at a congressional hearing in September.
- At the hearing, Facebook contested the Journal's reporting, saying that the newspaper mischaracterized the company's findings and that the company's research showed many teens said Instagram is helping them.
- On Monday, Facebook said it is reviewing the Australian proposal for new privacy rules and that it looks forward to working with the government on the issue.
- the U.S., have laws requiring parental consent in some situations, though Australian officials believe their privacy protections will be among the strongest in the world.
- Facebook officials have previously said the company tries to enforce age limits.
- In a July blog post, Facebook's vice president of youth products, Pavni Diwanji, said Facebook and Instagram weren't designed for people under the age of 13 and that the company generally requires people to be at least 13 to sign up.
- Australia has taken an aggressive stance on regulating U.S. tech giants, an approach that has been widely watched as other countries mull similar steps.

## ★● Big-Name Democrats Say 'No Thanks' to Facebook's Top Lobbyist Job

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-encounters-challenge-in-bid-to-hire-a-prominent-democratic-lobbyist-11635240600?mod=Searchresults\\_pos6&page=2](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-encounters-challenge-in-bid-to-hire-a-prominent-democratic-lobbyist-11635240600?mod=Searchresults_pos6&page=2)

Oct. 26, 2021 at 5:30 am ET

- As President Biden and Congress threaten tougher regulations, prominent Democrats have been rebuffing lucrative jobs at Facebook, and senior Democratic lobbyists have been leaving its Washington team.
- Facebook has been trying since January to hire a big-name Democrat to oversee its U.S. lobbying operations, a job that would pay more than \$2.5 million a year in salary, stock and bonuses, according to people familiar with the situation.
- It is also looking to hire Democrats and Republicans for more than a dozen high-level legal, lobbying and public-policy jobs, according to people who have been approached about the roles and job postings on LinkedIn.
- Democrats who have passed on Facebook's outreach include veteran Capitol Hill aides, a senior adviser to Mr. Biden and aides to former President Barack Obama, including Valerie Jarrett, according to people familiar with the job search.
- Facebook spokesman Andy Stone said it takes time to find the right person to lead its Washington lobbying team and that the company hasn't struggled to attract and retain Democrats.
- The vacancies mean Republicans run Facebook's Washington lobbying office, led by its vice president of global public policy, Joel Kaplan, a former aide to President George W. Bush.
- Currently 22 Democrats and 39 Republicans now lobby for the company, including outside firms Facebook has on retainer, according to the Journal's analysis of lobbying disclosure reports and current and former Facebook lobbyists.
- Facebook's difficulty recruiting Democrats for Washington roles is the latest sign of the company's declining political fortunes and could make it harder for the company to influence efforts by Democrats to write tough new rules for internet platforms and take antitrust action against Facebook and other technology. It also comes as Facebook deals with the political fallout from internal company research documents showing harms from the company's products, including contributing to negative self-esteem among teenagers and the fostering of social discord.
- Facebook spent nearly \$20 million on lobbying last year, the most of any company in 2020, but finds itself under attack from Republicans and Democrats alike.
- Facebook decided against taking down a video of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D., Calif.) that was altered to make her appear drunk.



- Some Democratic lobbyists said they declined to work for Facebook in order to stay in Mrs. Pelosi's good graces.
- Facebook's congressional outreach to Democrats had been run since 2013 by one of Mrs. Pelosi's most trusted former aides, Catlin O'Neill, granddaughter of former House speaker Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill.
- President Biden criticized Facebook over the spread of misinformation about Covid-19.
- The company responded with a statement saying the president was looking for a "scapegoat" for not meeting his vaccination goals—an escalation of the situation that blindsided and incensed some of Facebook's Washington policy employees, some of them said.
- Facebook's testy relations with the Biden White House were another reason Democratic veterans have been wary of working for the company, according to people familiar with the hiring process. "
- Democrats who have declined Facebook's overtures include Ms. Jarrett and Broderick Johnson, a Capitol Hill veteran who also worked for Mr. Obama in the White House, some of the people said.
- Mr. Johnson took a job with Comcast Corp. Jessica Hertz, a Facebook lawyer who left last year to work for Mr. Biden and then was appointed White House staff secretary, was approached informally about returning in a senior legal position.
- Ms. Hertz left the White House this month, but she told Facebook she isn't interested in returning, according to people familiar with the outreach.
- The company has more than a dozen openings for legal, lobbying and public-policy positions, many of which pay more than \$100,000, according to the company's job listings.

## Facebook Faces Official Questions in India Over Policing of Hate Speech

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-faces-official-questions-in-india-over-policing-of-hate-speech-11635427582?st=5ayenkvt928v8z&reflink=desktopwebshare\\_permalink](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-faces-official-questions-in-india-over-policing-of-hate-speech-11635427582?st=5ayenkvt928v8z&reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink)

Oct. 28, 2021 at 9:26 am ET

- India's government has asked Facebook Inc. for details about how it monitors and removes inflammatory content on its platform in the country, according to government officials.
- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology wrote to Facebook's top executive in India this week, the officials said.
- The letter follows news reports including a Wall Street Journal article Saturday that said Facebook researchers had determined the company's services are rife with inflammatory content in India, much of it anti-Muslim.
- written to India's Parliamentary Standing Committee on Information Technology calling for an inquiry into Facebook's "real world harms" following the Journal's articles and material made public by a former worker last year about the company's global operations.
- India is Facebook's largest market by users, with hundreds of millions of users, and key to its future growth as more people get online in the country of more than 1.3 billion.
- The company and other U.S. tech firms face growing challenges in the South Asian nation.
- The government has been making new rules that grant its leaders significant power over online discourse.
- India's government has threatened to jail employees of Facebook, its WhatsApp messaging service, and Twitter Inc. if they didn't comply with data or take-down requests, the Journal reported in February.

## ★● Facebook Changes Company Name to Meta in Focus on Metaverse

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/mark-zuckerberg-to-sketch-out-facebooks-metaverse-vision-11635413402?st=6e3thh4y48s54hk&reflink=desktopwebshare\\_permalink](https://www.wsj.com/articles/mark-zuckerberg-to-sketch-out-facebooks-metaverse-vision-11635413402?st=6e3thh4y48s54hk&reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink)

Updated Oct. 28, 2021 at 7:51 pm ET

- Facebook Inc. Chief Executive Officer Mark Zuckerberg said the company changed its name to Meta to reflect growth opportunities beyond its namesake social-media platform in online digital realms known as the metaverse. "
- Over time I hope our company will be seen as a metaverse company," Mr. Zuckerberg said Thursday.
- He unveiled the name, formally Meta Platforms Inc., for the company that also includes Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and other products during Facebook's annual developer event, where he detailed his vision for the metaverse that he sees as key to the tech giant attracting younger users. "
- We believe the metaverse will be the successor to the mobile internet."
- The name change appears to veer away from Facebook's move two years ago to revamp its logo and corporate identity and boost the name's prominence by attaching "from Facebook" to the various other brands the company started or acquired over the years.
- Facebook traces its name to the company's origin, when Mr. Zuckerberg, then a student at Harvard University, named an early version of the site after the term for the school's student directories.
- Facebook is one of many big tech companies with metaverse-related objectives.
- At Thursday's event, the Facebook chief took an implicit swipe at rival Apple for the fees it charges on its App Store.
- I believe that the lack of choice, high fees are stifling innovation and stopping people from building new things and holding back the entire internet economy," Mr. Zuckerberg said.
- He has groused for years that Apple holds too much sway over the social-media giant's business.
- Apple has defended its App Store policy as benefiting consumers.
- Facebook said earlier this month that it plans to create 10,000 jobs in Europe over the next five years to work on metaverse-related endeavors.

## ★ Facebook's Four New Letters Won't Spell Alphabet

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebooks-four-new-letters-wont-spell-alphabet-11635499800?st=zcftw6228dfurpl&reflink=desktopwebshare\\_permalink](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebooks-four-new-letters-wont-spell-alphabet-11635499800?st=zcftw6228dfurpl&reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink)

Oct. 29, 2021 at 5:30 am ET

- On Thursday, Facebook co-founder and chief executive officer Mark Zuckerberg announced that the social-media company was formally becoming Meta Platforms Inc., with the new name embodying the metaverse company Facebook has set its sights on becoming.
- The metaverse, according to Mr. Zuckerberg, will be a successor to the mobile internet—a place where you can socialize, work, play and buy with privacy and safety built in from day one.
- A company that for nearly two decades has been synonymous with social media is now trying to rebrand itself as something much more, even ditching its FB ticker symbol.
- The timing is both curious and convenient, coming as the company is ensnared in a new controversy caused by the leaking of thousands of internal documents by a whistleblower.
- Facebook has arguably been in crisis mode since the Cambridge Analytica scandal in 2018.
- Facebook's move has elicited comparisons with Google's reorganization into the company currently known as Alphabet.
- Facebook will be hard-pressed to repeat Alphabet's magic.
- The company's non-advertising revenue of \$2.8 billion over the past four quarters is nearly four times that of Alphabet.
- Facebook says such spending will reduce its operating profit by \$10 billion this year alone.
- Facebook's Mr. Zuckerberg, a more divisive figure, was clear on Thursday that he intends to be the face of his company's past, present and future.

## ★● Mark Zuckerberg's Meta Pivot Is Personal as Well as Strategic

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/mark-zuckerbergs-latest-pivot-is-personal-as-well-as-strategic-11635508801?st=rchn3cwthzja2uz&reflink=desktopwebshare\\_permalink](https://www.wsj.com/articles/mark-zuckerbergs-latest-pivot-is-personal-as-well-as-strategic-11635508801?st=rchn3cwthzja2uz&reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink)

Oct. 29, 2021 at 8:00 am ET

- Mark Zuckerberg's announcement that Facebook Inc. is focusing on the metaverse and changing its name to Meta Platforms Inc. is in many ways a personal rebranding as much as a corporate one.
- The co-founder has refashioned the company several times over the years—in part through notable acquisitions of Instagram, WhatsApp, and Oculus VR—and in the process has sought to establish himself as the champion and grand visionary of the next wave of the internet.
- A Facebook representative couldn't be immediately reached for comment, but in an open letter released Thursday Mr. Zuckerberg called the move "the beginning of the next chapter for the internet, and it's the next chapter for our company too."
- The metaverse, a concept rooted in science-fiction novels like "Ready Player One" and "Snow Crash," is an extensive online world that would exist across several technology platforms, not just one.
- Facebook changed course again in 2017 after coming under fire for allowing disinformation and hate speech to spread during the 2016 U.S. presidential race.
- Then, Mr. Zuckerberg announced that Facebook would become the new social infrastructure, with a focus on fortifying connections between users through its features, including Groups.
- Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has pushed to reinvent the company every few years.
- He also said Facebook would spend \$10 billion to develop the metaverse.
- The metaverse announcement comes as the company is facing another scandal, this time related to thousands of internal documents that formed the basis of a series of stories from The Wall Street Journal called "The Facebook Files."
- "We're a company that focuses on connecting people. While most other tech companies focus on how people interact with technology, we focus on building technology so people can interact with each other," he said. "Today, we're seen as a social media company. But in our DNA, we're a company that builds technology to connect people, and the metaverse is the next frontier."
- Mr. Zuckerberg fenced in the metaverse during a live-streamed conference on Thursday.
- The future of the company will depend on whether Mr. Zuckerberg can pull it off, the analysts said in the note.
- The Facebook CEO, according to people who know him and his public statements, is keenly aware that tech companies can lose focus over time, especially when facing legal and regulatory threats.
- His mentor, Microsoft Corp. co-founder Bill Gates, said in 2019 that his "greatest mistake ever" was failing to invest more in mobile devices during the company's antitrust woes.
- After focusing on politics much of the past year, Mr. Zuckerberg is refocusing his energy on products or, as he described it on Thursday, "ecosystems" for users to inhabit.
- That would fulfill Mr. Zuckerberg's ambition to be less reliant on Apple Inc. and Alphabet Inc.'s Google, the two giants that run the dominant operating systems for smartphones.
- The tension with Apple came to a head this year when it rolled out new privacy rules that required apps to ask users whether they would like to share their data and allow them to opt out if desired. The move cut into Facebook's ability to help advertisers track the success of their campaigns.
- Mr. Zuckerberg said the company has "learned what it is like to build for other platforms and living under their rules has profoundly shaped my views on the tech industry. Most of all, I've come to believe that the lack of choice and high fees are stifling innovation, stopping people from building new things and holding back the entire internet economy."

## Patagonia Is Boycotting Facebook, Urges Other Companies to Do the Same

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/patagonia-is-boycotting-facebook-urges-other-companies-to-do-the-same-11635514110?st=w40i1hnj16cr9xl&reflink=desktopwebshare\\_permalink](https://www.wsj.com/articles/patagonia-is-boycotting-facebook-urges-other-companies-to-do-the-same-11635514110?st=w40i1hnj16cr9xl&reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink)

Oct. 29, 2021 at 9:28 am ET

- Patagonia is doubling down on its decision to stop all paid advertising on Facebook Inc. platforms, urging other companies to join the sportswear company in its boycott of the social-networking company as it faces widespread scrutiny following the release of internal documents.
- In a statement, Patagonia Chief Executive Ryan Gellert urged Facebook to "prioritize people and planet over profit."

- Facebook has said that some of the documents were taken out of context or mischaracterized.
- Patagonia said it began boycotting Facebook platforms 16 months ago because of its claims that the social network spreads hate speech and misinformation about climate change and politics.

## THE FACEBOOK FILES

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-facebook-files-11631713039?mod=bigtop-breadcrumb>

- Facebook Inc. knows, in acute detail, that its platforms are riddled with flaws that cause harm, often in ways only the company fully understands. That is the central finding of a Wall Street Journal series, based on a review of internal Facebook documents, including research reports, online employee discussions and drafts of presentations to senior management.

# Facebook Says Its Rules Apply to All. Company Documents Reveal a Secret Elite That's Exempt.

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-files-xcheck-zuckerberg-elite-rules-11631541353?mod=article\\_inline](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-files-xcheck-zuckerberg-elite-rules-11631541353?mod=article_inline)

Sept. 13, 2021 10:21 am ET

- A program known as XCheck has given millions of celebrities, politicians and other high-profile users special treatment, a privilege many abuse
- In private, the company has built a system that has exempted high-profile users from some or all of its rules, according to company documents reviewed by The Wall Street Journal.
- Some users are “whitelisted”—rendered immune from enforcement actions—while others are allowed to post rule-violating material pending Facebook employee reviews that often never come.
- A 2019 internal review of Facebook’s whitelisting practices, marked attorney-client privileged, found favoritism to those users to be both widespread and “not publicly defensible.”
- “We are not actually doing what we say we do publicly,” said the confidential review. It called the company’s actions “a breach of trust” and added: “Unlike the rest of our community, these people can violate our standards without any consequences.”
- Despite attempts to rein it in, XCheck grew to include at least 5.8 million users in 2020, documents show. In its struggle to accurately moderate a torrent of content and avoid negative attention, Facebook created invisible elite tiers within the social network.
- In describing the system, Facebook has misled the public and its own Oversight Board, a body that Facebook created to ensure the accountability of the company’s enforcement systems.
- The documents that describe XCheck are part of an extensive array of internal Facebook communications reviewed by The Wall Street Journal. They show that Facebook knows, in acute detail, that its platforms are riddled with flaws that cause harm, often in ways only the company fully understands.
- Moreover, the documents show, Facebook often lacks the will or the ability to address them.
- Time and again, the documents show, in the U.S. and overseas, Facebook’s own researchers have identified the platform’s ill effects, in areas including teen mental health, political discourse and human trafficking. Time and again, despite congressional hearings, its own pledges and numerous media exposés, the company didn’t fix them.
- Sometimes the company held back for fear of hurting its business. In other cases, Facebook made changes that backfired. Even Mr. Zuckerberg’s pet initiatives have been thwarted by his own systems and algorithms.
- The documents include research reports, online employee discussions and drafts of presentations to senior management, including Mr. Zuckerberg. They aren’t the result of idle grumbling, but rather the formal work of teams whose job was to examine the social network and figure out how it could improve.

- They offer perhaps the clearest picture thus far of how broadly Facebook's problems are known inside the company, up to the CEO himself. And when Facebook speaks publicly about many of these issues, to lawmakers, regulators and, in the case of XCheck, its own Oversight Board, it often provides misleading or partial answers, masking how much it knows.
- For ordinary users, Facebook dispenses a kind of rough justice in assessing whether posts meet the company's rules against bullying, sexual content, hate speech and incitement to violence.
- Sometimes the company's automated systems summarily delete or bury content suspected of rule violations without a human review. At other times, material flagged by those systems or by users is assessed by content moderators employed by outside companies.
- Mr. Zuckerberg estimated in 2018 that Facebook gets 10% of its content removal decisions wrong, and, depending on the enforcement action taken, users might never be told what rule they violated or be given a chance to appeal.
- If Facebook's systems conclude that one of those accounts might have broken its rules, they don't remove the content—at least not right away, the documents indicate. They route the complaint into a separate system, staffed by better-trained, full-time employees, for additional layers of review.
- Most Facebook employees were able to add users into the XCheck system, the documents say, and a 2019 audit found that at least 45 teams around the company were involved in whitelisting. Users aren't generally told that they have been tagged for special treatment. An internal guide to XCheck eligibility cites qualifications including being "newsworthy," "influential or popular" or "PR risky."
- The lists of those enrolled in XCheck were "scattered throughout the company, without clear governance or ownership," according to a "Get Well Plan" from last year. "This results in not applying XCheck to those who pose real risks and on the flip-side, applying XCheck to those that do not deserve it (such as abusive accounts, persistent violators). These have created PR fires."
- In practice, Facebook appeared more concerned with avoiding gaffes than mitigating high-profile abuse. One Facebook review in 2019 of major XCheck errors showed that of 18 incidents investigated, 16 involved instances where the company erred in actions taken against prominent users.
- Historically, Facebook contacted some VIP users who violated platform policies and provided a "self-remediation window" of 24 hours to delete violating content on their own before Facebook took it down and applied penalties.
- Mr. Stone, the company spokesman, said Facebook has phased out that perk, which was still in place during the 2020 elections. He declined to say when it ended.
- At times, pulling content from a VIP's account requires approval from senior executives on the communications and public-policy teams, or even from Mr. Zuckerberg or Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg, according to people familiar with the matter.
- While the program included most government officials, it didn't include all candidates for public office, at times effectively granting incumbents in elections an advantage over challengers. The discrepancy was most prevalent in state and local races, the documents show, and employees worried Facebook could be subject to accusations of favoritism.
- The program covers pretty much anyone regularly in the media or who has a substantial online following, including film stars, cable talk-show hosts, academics and online personalities with large followings.
- Even when the company does review the material, enforcement delays like the one on Neymar's posts mean content that should have been prohibited can spread to large audiences. Last year, XCheck allowed posts that violated its rules to be viewed at least 16.4 billion times, before later being removed, according to a summary of the program in late December.
- In addition, Facebook has asked fact-checking partners to retroactively change their findings on posts from high-profile accounts, waived standard punishments for propagating what it classifies as misinformation and even altered planned changes to its algorithms to avoid political fallout.
- Part of the problem is resources. While Facebook has trumpeted its spending on an army of content moderators, it still isn't capable of fully processing the torrent of user-generated content on its platforms. Even assuming adequate staffing and a higher accuracy rate, making millions of moderation decisions a day would still involve numerous high-profile calls with the potential for bad PR.

- Facebook wanted a system for “reducing false positives and human workload,” according to one internal document. The XCheck system was set up to do that.
- To minimize conflict with average users, the company has long kept its notifications of content removals opaque. Users often describe on Facebook, Instagram or rival platforms what they say are removal errors, often accompanied by a screenshot of the notice they receive.
- After seeking input from 41 employees, Facebook said in a report about the incident that XCheck remained too often “reactive and demand-driven.” The report concluded that XCheck should be expanded further to include prominent independent journalists such as Mr. El Sokkari, to avoid future public-relations black eyes.
- In response to what the documents describe as chronic underinvestment in moderation efforts, many teams around Facebook chose not to enforce the rules with high-profile accounts at all—the practice referred to as whitelisting. In some instances, whitelist status was granted with little record of who had granted it and why, according to the 2019 audit.
- “This problem is pervasive, touching almost every area of the company,” the 2019 review states, citing the audit. It concluded that whitelists “pose numerous legal, compliance, and legitimacy risks for the company and harm to our community.”
- A plan to fix the program, described in a document the following year, said that blanket exemptions and posts that were never subsequently reviewed had become the core of the program, meaning most content from XCheck users wasn’t subject to enforcement. “We currently review less than 10% of XChecked content,” the document stated.
- High-profile accounts posed greater risks than regular ones, researchers noted, yet were the least policed.
- That same month, employees debated on Workplace, the internal platform, about the merits of going public with the XCheck program.
- The fairness concerns were real and XCheck had been mismanaged, the product manager wrote, but “we have to balance that with business risk.” Since the company was already trying to address the program’s failings, the best approach was “internal transparency,” he said.
- “It’s not feasible to track this information,” Facebook wrote in its responses. “We have explained this product in our newsroom,” it added, linking to a 2018 blog post that declared “we remove content from Facebook, no matter who posts it, when it breaks our standards.” Facebook’s 2019 internal review had previously cited that same blog post as misleading.
- The XCheck documents show that Facebook misled the Oversight Board, said Kate Klonick, a law professor at St. John’s University. The board was funded with an initial \$130 million commitment from Facebook in 2019, and Ms. Klonick was given special access by the company to study the group’s formation and its processes.
- In a written statement, a spokesman for the board said it “has expressed on multiple occasions its concern about the lack of transparency in Facebook’s content moderation processes, especially relating to the company’s inconsistent management of high-profile accounts.”
- Facebook is trying to eliminate the practice of whitelisting, the documents show and the company spokesman confirmed. The company set a goal of eliminating total immunity for “high severity” violations of FB rules in the first half of 2021. A March update reported that the company was struggling to rein in additions to XCheck.

# Facebook Knows Instagram Is Toxic for Teen Girls, Company Documents Show



[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-knows-instagram-is-toxic-for-teen-girls-company-documents-show-11631620739?mod=hp\\_lead\\_pos7&mod=article\\_inline](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-knows-instagram-is-toxic-for-teen-girls-company-documents-show-11631620739?mod=hp_lead_pos7&mod=article_inline)

Sept. 14, 2021 7:59 am ET

- About a year ago, teenager Anastasia Vlasova started seeing a therapist. She had developed an eating disorder, and had a clear idea of what led to it: her time on Instagram.
- She joined the platform at 13, and eventually was spending three hours a day entranced by the seemingly perfect lives and bodies of the fitness influencers who posted on the app.
- Around that time, researchers inside Instagram, which is owned by Facebook Inc., were studying this kind of experience and asking whether it was part of a broader phenomenon. Their findings confirmed some serious problems.
- Thirty-two percent of teen girls said that when they felt bad about their bodies, Instagram made them feel worse,” the researchers said in a March 2020 slide presentation posted to Facebook’s internal message board, reviewed by The Wall Street Journal. “Comparisons on Instagram can change how young women view and describe themselves.”
- For the past three years, Facebook has been conducting studies into how its photo-sharing app affects its millions of young users. Repeatedly, the company’s researchers found that Instagram is harmful for a sizable percentage of them, most notably teenage girls.
- Expanding its base of young users is vital to the company’s more than \$100 billion in annual revenue, and it doesn’t want to jeopardize their engagement with the platform.
- More than 40% of Instagram’s users are 22 years old and younger, and about 22 million teens log onto Instagram in the U.S. each day, compared with five million teens logging onto Facebook, where young users have been shrinking for a decade, the materials show.
- On average, teens in the U.S. spend 50% more time on Instagram than they do on Facebook.
- “Instagram is well positioned to resonate and win with young people,” said a researcher’s slide posted internally. Another post said: “There is a path to growth if Instagram can continue their trajectory.”
- In public, Facebook has consistently played down the app’s negative effects on teens, and hasn’t made its research public or available to academics or lawmakers who have asked for it.
- He said he believes Facebook was late to realizing there were drawbacks to connecting people in such large numbers. “I’ve been pushing very hard for us to embrace our responsibilities more broadly,” he said.
- He said the research into the mental-health effects on teens was valuable, and that Facebook employees ask tough questions about the platform. “For me, this isn’t dirty laundry. I’m actually very proud of this research,” he said.
- The Instagram documents form part of a trove of internal communications reviewed by the Journal, on areas including teen mental health, political discourse and human trafficking. They offer an unparalleled picture of how Facebook is acutely aware that the products and systems central to its business success routinely fail.
- The documents also show that Facebook has made minimal efforts to address these issues and plays them down in public.
- The company’s research on Instagram, the deepest look yet at what the tech giant knows about its impact on teens and their mental well-being, represents one of the clearest gaps revealed in the documents between Facebook’s understanding of itself and its public position.
- Its effort includes focus groups, online surveys and diary studies in 2019 and 2020. It also includes large-scale surveys of tens of thousands of people in 2021 that paired user responses with Facebook’s own data about how much time users spent on Instagram and what they saw there.
- The researchers are Facebook employees in areas including data science, marketing and product development who work on a range of issues related to how users interact with the platform. Many have backgrounds in computer science, psychology and quantitative and qualitative analysis.
- They came to the conclusion that some of the problems were specific to Instagram, and not social media more broadly. That is especially true concerning so-called social comparison, which is when people assess their own value in relation to the attractiveness, wealth and success of others.
- “Social comparison is worse on Instagram,” states Facebook’s deep dive into teen girl body-image issues in 2020, noting that TikTok, a short-video app, is grounded in performance, while users on Snapchat, a

rival photo and video-sharing app, are sheltered by jokey filters that “keep the focus on the face.” In contrast, Instagram focuses heavily on the body and lifestyle.

- The tendency to share only the best moments, a pressure to look perfect and an addictive product can send teens spiraling toward eating disorders, an unhealthy sense of their own bodies and depression, March 2020 internal research states. It warns that the Explore page, which serves users photos and videos curated by an algorithm, can send users deep into content that can be harmful.
- In August, Sens. Richard Blumenthal and Marsha Blackburn in a letter to Mr. Zuckerberg called on him to release Facebook’s internal research on the impact of its platforms on youth mental health.
- In response, Facebook sent the senators a six-page letter that didn’t include the company’s own studies. Instead, Facebook said there are many challenges with conducting research in this space, saying, “We are not aware of a consensus among studies or experts about how much screen time is ‘too much,’ ” according to a copy of the letter reviewed by the Journal.
- Facebook also told the senators that its internal research is proprietary and “kept confidential to promote frank and open dialogue and brainstorming internally.”
- “Facebook’s answers were so evasive—failing to even respond to all our questions—that they really raise questions about what Facebook might be hiding,” Sen. Blumenthal said in an email. “Facebook seems to be taking a page from the textbook of Big Tobacco—targeting teens with potentially dangerous products while masking the science in public.”
- When Facebook paid \$1 billion for Instagram in 2012, it was a tiny startup with 13 employees and already a hit. That year, Facebook for the first time had observed a decline in the number of teens using its namesake Facebook product, according to the documents. The company would come to see Instagram as Facebook’s best bet for growth among teens.
- Facebook had been tracking the rise of buzzy features on competitor apps, including Snapchat, and in 2016 directed employees to focus on winning what they viewed as a race for teen users, according to former Instagram executives.
- Facebook’s research indicates Instagram’s effects aren’t harmful for all users. For most teenagers, the effects of “negative social comparison” are manageable and can be outweighed by the app’s utility as a fun way for users to express themselves and connect with friends, the research says.
- But a mounting body of Facebook’s own evidence shows Instagram can be damaging for many.
- In one study of teens in the U.S. and U.K., Facebook found that more than 40% of Instagram users who reported feeling “unattractive” said the feeling began on the app. About a quarter of the teens who reported feeling “not good enough” said the feeling started on Instagram. Many also said the app undermined their confidence in the strength of their friendships.
- Instagram’s researchers noted that those struggling with the platform’s psychological effects weren’t necessarily logging off. Teens regularly reported wanting to spend less time on Instagram, the presentations note, but lacked the self control to do so.
- “Teens told us that they don’t like the amount of time they spend on the app but feel like they have to be present,” an Instagram research manager explained to colleagues, according to the documents. “They often feel ‘addicted’ and know that what they’re seeing is bad for their mental health but feel unable to stop themselves.”
- For years, there has been little debate among medical doctors that for some patients, Instagram and other social media exacerbate their conditions. Angela Guarda, director for the eating-disorders program at Johns Hopkins Hospital and an associate professor of psychiatry in the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, said it is common for her patients to say they learned from social media tips for how to restrict food intake or purge. She estimates that Instagram and other social-media apps play a role in the disorders of about half her patients.
- “It’s the ones who are most vulnerable or are already developing a problem—the use of Instagram and other social media can escalate it,” she said.
- In January 2020, Facebook invited Mr. Haidt to its Menlo Park, Calif., headquarters, where Mr. Mosseri and Instagram staff briefed him on the platform’s efforts to combat bullying and reduce social pressure on the platform. Mr. Haidt said he found those efforts sincere and laudable but warned that they likely weren’t enough to battle what he believes is a mounting public-health epidemic.

- Some Instagram researchers said it was challenging to get other colleagues to hear the gravity of their findings. Plus, “We’re standing directly between people and their bonuses,” one former researcher said.
- Instead of referencing their own data showing the negative effects of Instagram, Facebook executives in public have often pointed to studies from the Oxford Internet Institute that have shown little correlation between social-media use and depression.
- Other studies also found discrepancies between the amount of time people say they use social media and the amount of time they actually use such services. Mr. Mosseri has pointed to these studies as evidence for why research using self-reported data might not be accurate.
- For years, Facebook experimented with hiding the tallies of “likes” that users see on their photos. Teens told Facebook in focus groups that “like” counts caused them anxiety and contributed to their negative feelings.
- When Facebook tested a tweak to hide the “likes” in a pilot program they called Project Daisy, it found it didn’t improve life for teens. “We didn’t observe movements in overall well-being measures,” Facebook employees wrote in a slide they presented to Mr. Zuckerberg about the experiment in 2020.
- Nonetheless, Facebook rolled out the change as an option for Facebook and Instagram users in May 2021 after senior executives argued to Mr. Zuckerberg that it could make them look good by appearing to address the issue, according to the documents.
- In the interview, he said he doesn’t think there are clear-cut solutions to fixing Instagram. He said he is cautiously optimistic about tools Instagram is developing to identify people who are in trouble and to try to “nudge” them toward more positive content.
- In the internal documents, Facebook’s researchers also suggested Instagram could surface “fun” filters rather than ones around beautification. They zeroed in on selfies, particularly filtered ones that allow users to touch-up their faces. “Sharing or viewing filtered selfies in stories made people feel worse,” the researchers wrote in January.
- In March, the researchers said Instagram should reduce exposure to celebrity content about fashion, beauty and relationships, while increasing exposure to content from close friends, according to a slide deck they uploaded to Facebook’s internal message board.
- A now-former executive questioned the idea of overhauling Instagram to avoid social comparison. “People use Instagram because it’s a competition,” the former executive said. “That’s the fun part.”
- To promote more positive use of Instagram, the company has partnered with nonprofits to promote what it calls “emotional resilience,” according to the documents. Videos produced as part of that effort include recommending that teens consider daily affirmations to remind themselves that “I am in control of my experience on Instagram.”
- Teen boys aren’t immune. In the deep dive Facebook’s researchers conducted into mental health in 2019, they found that 14% of boys in the U.S. said Instagram made them feel worse about themselves. In their report on body image in 2020, Facebook’s researchers found that 40% of teen boys experience negative social comparison.
- Many of the teens interviewed for this article said they didn’t want Instagram to disappear. Ms. Vlasova, who no longer uses Instagram, said she is skeptical Facebook’s executives have tried hard enough to make their platform less toxic.

# Facebook Tried to Make Its Platform a Healthier Place. It Got Angrier Instead.

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-algorithm-change-zuckerberg-11631654215?mod=article\\_inline](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-algorithm-change-zuckerberg-11631654215?mod=article_inline)

Sept. 15, 2021 9:26 am ET

- In the fall of 2018, Jonah Peretti, chief executive of online publisher BuzzFeed, emailed a top official at Facebook Inc. The most divisive content that publishers produced was going viral on the platform, he said, creating an incentive to produce more of it.
- Mr. Peretti blamed a major overhaul Facebook had given to its News Feed algorithm earlier that year to boost “meaningful social interactions,” or MSI, between friends and family, according to internal Facebook documents reviewed by The Wall Street Journal that quote the email.
- BuzzFeed built its business on making content that would go viral on Facebook and other social media, so it had a vested interest in any algorithm changes that hurt its distribution. Still, Mr. Peretti’s email touched a nerve.
- Facebook’s chief executive, Mark Zuckerberg, said the aim of the algorithm change was to strengthen bonds between users and to improve their well-being. Facebook would encourage people to interact more with friends and family and spend less time passively consuming professionally produced content, which research suggested was harmful to their mental health.
- Within the company, though, staffers warned the change was having the opposite effect, the documents show. It was making Facebook’s platform an angrier place.
- Company researchers discovered that publishers and political parties were reorienting their posts toward outrage and sensationalism. That tactic produced high levels of comments and reactions that translated into success on Facebook.
- They concluded that the new algorithm’s heavy weighting of reshared material in its News Feed made the angry voices louder. “Misinformation, toxicity, and violent content are inordinately prevalent among reshares,” researchers noted in internal memos.
- Some political parties in Europe told Facebook the algorithm had made them shift their policy positions so they resonated more on the platform, according to the documents.
- Facebook employees also discussed the company’s other, less publicized motive for making the change: Users had begun to interact less with the platform, a worrisome trend, the documents show.
- In an interview, Lars Backstrom, a Facebook vice president of engineering, said that any algorithm risks promoting content that is objectionable or harmful to some users.
- “Like any optimization, there’s going to be some ways that it gets exploited or taken advantage of,” he said. “That’s why we have an integrity team that is trying to track those down and figure out how to mitigate them as efficiently as possible.”
- Data scientists on that integrity team—whose job is to improve the quality and trustworthiness of content on the platform—worked on a number of potential changes to curb the tendency of the overhauled algorithm to reward outrage and lies. Mr. Zuckerberg resisted some of the proposed fixes, the documents show, because he was worried they might hurt the company’s other objective—making users engage more with Facebook.
- Anna Stepanov, who led a team addressing those issues, presented Mr. Zuckerberg with several proposed changes meant to address the proliferation of false and divisive content on the platform, according to an April 2020 internal memo she wrote about the briefing. One such change would have taken away a boost the algorithm gave to content most likely to be reshared by long chains of users.
- “Mark doesn’t think we could go broad” with the change, she wrote to colleagues after the meeting. Mr. Zuckerberg said he was open to testing the approach, she said, but “We wouldn’t launch if there was a material tradeoff with MSI impact.”
- Last month, nearly a year and a half after Ms. Stepanov said Mr. Zuckerberg nixed the idea of broadly incorporating a similar fix, Facebook announced it was “gradually expanding some tests to put less emphasis on signals such as how likely someone is to comment or share political content.” The move is part of a broader push, spurred by user surveys, to reduce the amount of political content on Facebook after the company came under criticism for the way election protesters used the platform to question the results and organize protests that led to the Jan. 6 riot at the Capitol in Washington.
- Mr. Backstrom, who oversees content ranking in News Feed, said Facebook made the recent change because it felt that the downsides of relying on engagement-based metrics for sensitive content categories such as politics outweighed the benefits.

- Significant changes to the algorithm can have major implications for the company, advertisers and publishers. Facebook has made many algorithm tweaks over the years. The shift to emphasize MSI was one of the biggest.
- “Is a ranking change the source of the world’s divisions? No,” said Facebook spokesman Andy Stone in a written statement. “Research shows certain partisan divisions in our society have been growing for many decades, long before platforms like Facebook even existed.”
- Facebook training videos and internal memos show another reason for the change—the company’s growing concern about a decline in user engagement, which typically refers to actions like commenting on or sharing posts. Engagement is viewed inside the company as an important sign for the health of the business.
- One data scientist said in a 2020 memo that Facebook teams studied the issue and “never really figured out why metrics declined.” The team members ultimately concluded that the prevalence of video and other professionally produced content, rather than organic posts from individuals, was likely part of the problem.
- The goal of the algorithm change was to reverse the decline in comments, and other forms of engagement, and to encourage more original posting. It would reward posts that garnered more comments and emotion emojis, which were viewed as more meaningful than likes, the documents show.
- In an internal training video, one Facebook employee said that in addition to the company’s “ethical duty” not to turn users into zombies with too much video, it had business reasons for intervening.
- Facebook’s solution was to create a formula that measured how much “meaningful” interaction a post sparked, then organize the News Feed to encourage as much of that as possible. Under an internal point system used to measure its success, a “like” was worth one point; a reaction, reshare without text or reply to an invite was worth five points; and a significant comment, message, reshare or RSVP, 30 points. Additional multipliers were added depending on whether the interaction was between members of a group, friends or strangers.
- From a business perspective, it worked. As Facebook predicted, time spent on the platform declined, but the effort to maximize interactions between users slowed the free fall in comments, and mostly improved the all-important metric of “daily active people” using Facebook, according to tests run in August 2018, internal memos show.
- The change had some positive effects. Content shared by close connections was more trustworthy, and users found it more meaningful than material from more distant acquaintances, according to one memo. But those benefits were outweighed by the aspect of the algorithm change that favored user actions like reshares and comments.
- In an early sign of trouble, during the summer of 2018, Facebook data scientists repeatedly surveyed users and found that many felt the quality of their feeds had decreased, the documents show.
- As Facebook had warned was likely, the change hurt many online publishers. In the first half of 2018, BuzzFeed suffered a 13% decline in traffic compared with the prior six months, Breitbart lost 46% and ABC News lost 12%, according to online data firm Comscore.
- BuzzFeed’s Mr. Peretti, in his email, wrote that the new algorithm seemed to be disproportionately rewarding divisiveness, based on what the publisher saw in its own numbers and his observations about how other publishers’ posts performed.
- “MSI ranking isn’t actually rewarding content that drives meaningful social interactions,” Mr. Peretti wrote in his email to the Facebook official, adding that his staff felt “pressure to make bad content or underperform.”
- It wasn’t just material that exploited racial divisions, he wrote, but also “fad/junky science,” “extremely disturbing news” and gross images.
- Nina Jankowicz, who studies social media and democracy in Central and Eastern Europe as a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, said she has heard complaints from many political parties in that region that the algorithm change made direct communication with their supporters through Facebook pages more difficult. They now have an incentive, she said, to create posts that rack up comments and shares—often by tapping into anger—to get exposure in users’ feeds.

- Brad Parscale, who was the digital strategy leader for Donald Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign, and boasted that Facebook is where Mr. Trump won the election, said he began to notice changes to the algorithm as early as mid-2017, when the performance of political videos began to decline.
- In April 2019, one Facebook data scientist proposed reducing the spread of “deep reshares,” which means the viewer is not a friend or follower of the original poster, according to an internal memo.
- “While the FB platform offers people the opportunity to connect, share and engage, an unfortunate side effect is that harmful and misinformative content can go viral, often before we can catch it and mitigate its effects,” he wrote. “Political operatives and publishers tell us that they rely more on negativity and sensationalism for distribution due to recent algorithmic changes that favor reshares.”
- Later, Facebook data scientists zeroed in on an aspect of the revamped algorithm called “downstream MSI,” which made a post more likely to appear in a user’s News Feed if the algorithm calculated people were likely to share or comment on it as it passed down the chain of reshares.
- Early tests showed how reducing that aspect of the algorithm for civic and health information helped reduce the proliferation of false content. Facebook made the change for those categories in the spring of 2020.
- When Ms. Stepanov presented Mr. Zuckerberg with the integrity team’s proposal to expand that change beyond civic and health content—and a few countries such as Ethiopia and Myanmar where changes were already being made—Mr. Zuckerberg said he didn’t want to pursue it if it reduced user engagement, according to the documents.
- James Barnes, a former Facebook employee who left in 2019, said Facebook had hoped that giving priority to user engagement in the News Feed would bring people closer together. But the platform had grown so complex the company didn’t understand how the change might backfire.

# Facebook Employees Flag Drug Cartels and Human Traffickers. The Company’s Response Is Weak, Documents Show.

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-drug-cartels-human-traffickers-response-is-weak-documents-11631812953?mod=article\\_inline](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-drug-cartels-human-traffickers-response-is-weak-documents-11631812953?mod=article_inline)

Sept. 16, 2021 1:24 pm ET

- The biggest one: A Mexican drug cartel was using Facebook to recruit, train and pay hit men.
- The behavior was shocking and in clear violation of Facebook’s rules. But the company didn’t stop the cartel from posting on Facebook or Instagram, the company’s photo-sharing site.
- Scores of internal Facebook documents reviewed by The Wall Street Journal show employees raising alarms about how its platforms are used in some developing countries, where its user base is already huge and expanding. They also show the company’s response, which in many instances is inadequate or nothing at all.
- Employees flagged that human traffickers in the Middle East used the site to lure women into abusive employment situations in which they were treated like slaves or forced to perform sex work. They warned that armed groups in Ethiopia used the site to incite violence against ethnic minorities. They



sent alerts to their bosses on organ selling, pornography and government action against political dissent, according to the documents.

- Facebook removes some pages, though many more operate openly, according to the documents.
- In some countries where Facebook operates, it has few or no people who speak the dialects needed to identify dangerous or criminal uses of the platform, the documents show.
- When problems have surfaced publicly, Facebook has said it addressed them by taking down offending posts. But it hasn't fixed the systems that allowed offenders to repeat the bad behavior. Instead, priority is given to retaining users, helping business partners and at times placating authoritarian governments, whose support Facebook sometimes needs to operate within their borders, the documents show.
- Facebook treats harm in developing countries as "simply the cost of doing business" in those places, said Brian Boland, a former Facebook vice president who oversaw partnerships with internet providers in Africa and Asia before resigning at the end of last year. Facebook has focused its safety efforts on wealthier markets with powerful governments and media institutions, he said, even as it has turned to poorer countries for user growth.
- The developing world already has hundreds of millions more Facebook users than the U.S.—more than 90% of monthly users are now outside the U.S. and Canada. With growth largely stalled there and in Europe, nearly all of Facebook's new users are coming from developing countries, where Facebook is the main online communication channel and source of news. Facebook is rapidly expanding into such countries, planning for technology such as satellite internet and expanded Wi-Fi to bring users online including in poor areas of Indonesia one document described as "slums."
- The documents reviewed by the Journal are reports from employees who are studying the use of Facebook around the world, including human exploitation and other abuses of the platform. They write about their embarrassment and frustration, citing decisions that allow users to post videos of murders, incitements to violence, government threats against pro-democracy campaigners and advertisements for human trafficking.
- The material is part of extensive company communications reviewed by the Journal that offer unparalleled detail about the company's shortcomings in areas including rules that favor elites, teen mental health and efforts to manage its algorithm.
- "In countries at risk for conflict and violence, we have a comprehensive strategy, including relying on global teams with native speakers covering over 50 languages, educational resources, and partnerships with local experts and third-party fact checkers to keep people safe," Facebook spokesman Andy Stone said this week.
- An internal Facebook report from March said actors including some states were frequently on the platform promoting violence, exacerbating ethnic divides and delegitimizing social institutions. "This is particularly prevalent—and problematic—in At Risk Countries," the report says.
- The ex-cop and his team untangled the Jalisco New Generation Cartel's online network by examining posts on Facebook and Instagram, as well as private messages on those platforms, according to the documents. (Messages on WhatsApp, another Facebook product, are encrypted by default.)
- The cartel, which law-enforcement officials say is the biggest criminal drug threat to the U.S., didn't hide its activity. It had multiple Facebook pages with photos of gold-plated guns and bloody crime scenes, the documents show.
- The Facebook pages were posted under the name "CJNG," widely known as the shorthand for Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación, even though the company had internally labeled the cartel one of the "Dangerous Individuals and Organizations" whose pages should have been automatically removed from the platform under Facebook policy.
- Facebook didn't fully remove the cartel from its sites. The documents say it took down content tied to the cartel and disrupted the network.
- The investigation team asked another Facebook unit tasked with coordinating different divisions to look at ways to make sure a ban on the cartel could be enforced. That wasn't done effectively either, according to the documents, because the team assigned the job didn't follow up.
- On Jan. 13, nine days after the report was circulated internally, the first post appeared on a new CJNG Instagram account: A video of a person with a gold pistol shooting a young man in the head while blood

sputs from his neck. The next post is a photo of a beaten man tied to a chair; the one after that is a trash bag full of severed hands.

- The page, along with other Instagram and Facebook pages advertising the cartel, remained active for at least five months before being taken down. Since then, new pages have appeared under the CJNG name featuring guns and beheadings.
- Facebook commits fewer resources to stopping harm overseas than in the U.S., the documents show.
- In 2020, Facebook employees and contractors spent more than 3.2 million hours searching out and labeling or, in some cases, taking down information the company concluded was false or misleading, the documents show. Only 13% of those hours were spent working on content from outside the U.S. The company spent almost three times as many hours outside the U.S. working on “brand safety,” such as making sure ads don’t appear alongside content advertisers may find objectionable.
- The investigation team spent more than a year documenting a bustling human-trafficking trade in the Middle East taking place on its services. On Facebook and Instagram, unscrupulous employment agencies advertised workers they could supply under coercive terms, using their photos and describing their skills and personal details.
- The company took down some offending pages, but took only limited action to try to shut down the activity until Apple Inc. threatened to remove Facebook’s products from the App Store unless it cracked down on the practice. The threat was in response to a BBC story on maids for sale.
- One document from earlier this year suggested the company should use a light touch with Arabic-language warnings about human trafficking so as not to “alienate buyers”—meaning Facebook users who buy the domestic laborers’ contracts, often in situations akin to slavery.
- He added: “We have a dedicated team that engages with law enforcement agencies across the globe. In instances of imminent harm, we may also provide relevant information to law enforcement in accordance with applicable law and our terms of service.”
- In Ethiopia, armed groups have used Facebook to incite violence. The company’s internal communications show it doesn’t have enough employees who speak some of the relevant languages to help monitor the situation. For some languages, Facebook also failed to build automated systems, called classifiers, that could weed out the worst abuses. Artificial-intelligence systems that form the backbone of Facebook’s enforcement don’t cover most of the languages used on the site.
- Facebook also doesn’t publish the “community standards” it requires users to abide by in all of the languages it serves in Ethiopia, so some users may not know the rules they are supposed to follow.
- In a December planning document, a Facebook team wrote that the risk of bad consequences in Ethiopia was dire, and that “most of our great integrity work over the last 2 years doesn’t work in much of the world.” It said in some high-risk places like Ethiopia, “Our classifiers don’t work, and we’re largely blind to problems on our site.”
- India has more than 300 million Facebook users, the most of any country. Company researchers in 2019 set up a test account as a female Indian user and said they encountered a “nightmare” by merely following pages and groups recommended by Facebook’s algorithms.
- “The test user’s News Feed has become a near constant barrage of polarizing nationalist content, misinformation, and violence and gore,” they wrote. The video service Facebook Watch “seems to recommend a bunch of softcore porn.”
- After a suicide bombing killed dozens of Indian paramilitary officers, which India blamed on rival Pakistan, the account displayed drawings depicting beheadings and photos purporting to show a Muslim man’s severed torso. “I’ve seen more images of dead people in the past 3 weeks than I’ve seen in my entire life total,” one researcher wrote.
- Facebook last year said it agreed to curtail access to dissident political content deemed illegal in exchange for the Vietnamese government ending its practice of slowing Facebook’s local servers to pressure the company.
- A former Facebook employee who worked in Asia said Facebook is aware the Vietnamese government is using the platform to silence dissidents, but that it tolerates the abuse because Vietnam is a fast-growing advertising market.
- By looking across Facebook products, they found criminal networks recruiting people from poor countries, coordinating their travel and putting them into domestic servitude or into forced sex work in

the United Arab Emirates and other Persian Gulf countries. Facebook products facilitated each step, and the investigators followed communications across platforms to identify perpetrators and victims.

- Facebook in 2018 didn't have a protocol for dealing with recruiting posts for domestic servitude. In March 2018, employees found Instagram profiles dedicated to trafficking domestic servants in Saudi Arabia. An internal memo says they were allowed to remain on the site because the company's policies "did not acknowledge the violation."
- The investigation team identified multiple trafficking groups in operation, including one with at least 20 victims, and organizers who spent at least \$152,000 on Facebook ads for massage parlors.
- The former police officer recommended that Facebook disable WhatsApp numbers associated with the rings, put in new policies about ads purchased anonymously and improve its artificial intelligence to better root out posts related to human trafficking, according to the documents. He added that Facebook should develop a network to prevent trafficking by sharing findings with other tech companies.
- In another memo, the Polish trafficking expert wrote that 18 months after it first identified the problem, Facebook hadn't implemented systems to find and remove the trafficking posts.
- The BBC and Apple flagged concerns in 2019. With the threat posing "potentially severe consequences to the business," the trafficking expert wrote, Facebook began moving faster. A proactive sweep using the investigation team's prior research found more than 300,000 instances of potential violations and disabled more than 1,000 accounts.
- The team continued finding posts of human trafficking, and Facebook struggled to put effective policies in place. One document says Facebook delayed a project meant to improve understanding of human trafficking.
- At the end of 2020, following three months in which Facebook investigated a dozen networks suspected of human trafficking, a system for detecting it was deactivated. The trafficking investigators said that hurt their efforts, according to the documents.
- Facebook said this week it launched new programs this year that make it harder for users to find content related to sex trafficking.
- Over the past year, Facebook hired an outside consultant to advise it on the risks of the continuing trade in people on its sites. The consultant recommended that if revenue came in from trafficking advertisements, Facebook should develop a policy, such as giving it away, to avoid adding it to Facebook's coffers, according to the documents.

# How Facebook Hobbled Mark Zuckerberg's Bid to Get America Vaccinated

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-mark-zuckerberg-vaccinated-11631880296?mod=article\\_inline](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-mark-zuckerberg-vaccinated-11631880296?mod=article_inline)

Sept. 17, 2021 8:06 am ET

- In mid-March, Mark Zuckerberg used his Facebook page to announce a goal that was both ambitious and personal. He wanted his company to use its formidable resources to push 50 million people toward Covid-19 vaccines.
- Inside Facebook, staffers were warning that Mr. Zuckerberg's own platform, the globe-spanning powerhouse built on code he wrote 17 years ago, was compromising his effort.
- For more than a month, Facebook researchers warned that comments on vaccine-related posts—often factual posts of the sort Facebook sought to promote—were filled with antivaccine rhetoric aimed at undermining their message, internal documents reviewed by The Wall Street Journal show. The comments ranged from personal objections all the way to debunked falsehoods and conspiracy theories.

- The wave of negative comments worried global health institutions, including the World Health Organization and Unicef, the documents say. One internal Facebook memo cited “anti-vaccine commenters that swarm their Pages.”
- Users were seeing comments on vaccine-related posts 775 million times a day, the memo said, and Facebook researchers worried the large proportion of negative comments could influence perceptions of the vaccines’ safety.
- Even authoritative sources of vaccine information were becoming “cesspools of anti-vaccine comments,” the authors wrote. “That’s a huge problem and we need to fix it,” they said.
- Facebook’s goal of protecting the rollout of the Covid vaccines, described in one memo as “a top company priority,” was a demonstration of Mr. Zuckerberg’s faith that his creation is a force for social good in the world. But the effort ended up demonstrating the gulf between his aspirations and the practical reality of the world’s largest social platform—where the company’s aims can bring it into conflict with its own users.
- Despite Mr. Zuckerberg’s effort, a cadre of antivaccine activists flooded the network with what Facebook calls “barrier to vaccination” content, the memos show. They used Facebook’s own tools to sow doubt about the severity of the pandemic’s threat and the safety of authorities’ main weapon to combat it.
- By this summer, the prevalence of false and misleading vaccine information on Facebook prompted a public scolding from President Biden, who said the falsehoods were “killing people.”
- Since the Journal began publishing articles based on the documents, several lawmakers have expressed outrage at the revelations, and two senators have announced an investigation into Facebook’s internal research on how its Instagram service affects young users.
- Some Facebook officials have become concerned that Mr. Zuckerberg or Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg may face questions from lawmakers about how their past public statements on these issues square with the company’s internal assessments, according to people familiar with the matter. The company is also tightening the reins on how information is shared internally, the people said.
- The Covid-19 mess in particular strikes at the heart of Facebook’s problem: its users create the content, but their comments, posts and videos are hard to control, given how Facebook built and runs its platform, in ways that are fundamentally different from a company shaping its product or a publisher curating stories. Even when he set a goal, the chief executive couldn’t steer the platform as he wanted.
- Mr. Zuckerberg has long espoused the belief that Facebook’s role connecting people makes it a tool to help solve the world’s problems. Former executives say that optimism left him and his company repeatedly ill-prepared when people used the platform in ways it didn’t anticipate.
- “The internal narrative is that the platform is by and large good,” said Brian Boland, a former Facebook vice president who managed business relationships and left late last year in part because he said the company wasn’t forthcoming enough about its problems. He credits Mr. Zuckerberg with getting Facebook to work quickly on health initiatives during the pandemic but said his focus on connecting people created a blind spot for company leaders. “There was not a lot of discussion in our circles of, ‘Hey, are people propagating harmful messages on the platform?’ ” he said.
- Facebook has similarly struggled with how to handle the spread of inaccuracies on other issues, from QAnon conspiracy theories and other election falsehoods to hoax cancer cures and Holocaust denial. Mr. Zuckerberg initially permitted such denials on the platform on free speech grounds but last year changed his position, citing rising anti-Semitic violence.
- Fringe political activists used Facebook Groups, user-run communities devoted to topics and interests, to stir violence, the Journal has reported. The company had heavily promoted the product for years, though it clamped down in the wake of the 2020 U.S. election.
- Facebook employees had previously flagged comments made on posts as a largely unaddressed problem, according to a former employee and the documents reviewed by the Journal. Research in 2018 and 2019 found that comments were what one memo described as “an important source of misinformation, even on seemingly innocuous articles.”
- Mr. Zuckerberg has often stepped in to limit Facebook’s intervention on contentious content, saying it doesn’t take sides in controversial areas like politics and doesn’t want to be the arbiter of truth. On the

Covid vaccine, though, Mr. Zuckerberg was clear in his support, and on his desire for Facebook to assist public-health authorities in the vaccination effort.

- Mr. Zuckerberg has often described his company as a powerful engine to improve the world. In a 5,700-word essay in 2017, when Facebook was under fire after the 2016 election, he wrote that Facebook's next mission was building "social infrastructure" in part to make the world more resilient in crises. "Our greatest challenges also need global responses—like ending terrorism, fighting climate change, and preventing pandemics," Mr. Zuckerberg wrote.
- In February 2020, as the coronavirus spread, Facebook opened its Menlo Park, Calif., headquarters to the WHO for a meeting with tech companies including Alphabet Inc.'s Google and Twitter Inc., where a WHO official discussed the companies' role in spreading "lifesaving health information," according to the WHO.
- In subsequent emails to Dr. Fauci, Mr. Zuckerberg offered the government Facebook advertising credits for public-service announcements, as well as aggregated user data to help with decision-making. He also asked whether Dr. Fauci would appear with him in a live Facebook Q&A about the pandemic. The two appeared in one of multiple live Facebook videos four days later.
- Mr. Zuckerberg also announced that Facebook would coordinate its approach with global health authorities like the WHO, to whom it would direct users searching for coronavirus information. He said Facebook was removing false claims and conspiracy theories those authorities flagged. The company's standard at the time was to remove false Covid claims if they could cause imminent harm, such as by promising false protection from the disease.
- Still, false and misleading coronavirus information was rampant on the site. In May 2020, a video titled "Plandemic" advanced false claims such as the notion that masks worsened the coronavirus. It was highly popular on Facebook and promoted via Facebook ads before the company removed it.
- In August 2020, a report by advocacy group Avaaz concluded that the top 10 producers of what the group called "health misinformation" were garnering almost four times as many estimated views on Facebook as the top 10 sources of authoritative information. Facebook needed to take harsher measures to beat back "prolific" networks of Covid misinformation purveyors, Avaaz warned.
- Mr. Zuckerberg wasn't ready to embrace a more interventionist approach against its users. While he disagreed with antivaccine activists, his company was committed to removing only content that health officials said posed an imminent threat.
- As the rollout of the vaccine began early this year, antivaccine activists took advantage of that stance. A later analysis found that a small number of "big whales" were behind many antivaccine posts and groups on the platform. Out of nearly 150,000 posters in Facebook Groups disabled for Covid misinformation, 5% were producing half of all posts, and around 1,400 users were responsible for inviting half the groups' new members, according to one document.
- In February, Facebook made a big change to catch up with the wave of antivaccine content. The company said it would now remove a much longer list of false vaccine claims than before—including that vaccines aren't effective, or that it is safer to get the disease than to be vaccinated—rather than simply labeling them as false.
- Employees improvised, and by late February, two Facebook data scientists came up with a rough way to scan for what they called "vaccine hesitant" comments. They wrote in memos that "vaccine hesitancy in comments is rampant"—twice as prevalent as in posts. One of the scientists pointed out the company's ability to detect the content in comments was "bad in English, and basically non-existent elsewhere."
- A Unicef staffer said in an interview the group noticed its pro-vaccine posts faced "a huge deluge of antivax sentiment" when they reached a wider-than-normal audience, such as when they featured a famous spokesperson. Facebook's main advice to Unicef, the staffer said, was to "keep posting information that we know cuts through and targets our key audience."
- In late March, Facebook rolled out a change to help users address hostile responses to their public posts by turning off comments. Facebook didn't mention antivaccine content when announcing the change, but Mr. Rosen, the vice president of integrity, in an internal memo included the change when touting recent policies "to combat vaccine discouragement."
- In early May, the company activated more emergency responses it called "break the glass" measures to further demote the news feed ranking of content it described as sensationalist, alarmist or even

indirectly discouraging vaccines. After a manual review, the content would be demoted in the ranking by 50%, according to an internal memo.

- At a gathering of Facebook's leadership in and around Menlo Park early this month, some officials discussed whether Facebook has gotten too big, with too much data flowing to manage all of its content, said people familiar with the gathering. The tone from some participants was, "We created the machine and we can't control the machine," one of the people said.
- "If we see harmful misinformation on the platform, then we take it down. It's against our policy," Mr. Zuckerberg said in an interview on "CBS This Morning." "But do we catch everything? Of course, there are mistakes that we make or areas where we need to improve."

# Facebook's Effort to Attract Preteens Goes Beyond Instagram Kids, Documents Show

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-instagram-kids-tweens-attract-11632849667?mod=article\\_inline](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-instagram-kids-tweens-attract-11632849667?mod=article_inline)

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- [Facebook](#) Inc. has come under increasing fire in recent days for its effect on young users and its efforts to create products for them. Inside the company, teams of employees have for years been laying plans to attract preteens that go beyond what is publicly known, spurred by fear that Facebook could lose a new generation of users critical to its future
- Internal Facebook documents reviewed by The Wall Street Journal show the company formed a team to study preteens, set a three-year goal to create more products for them and commissioned strategy papers about the long-term business opportunities presented by these potential users. In one presentation, it contemplated whether there might be a way to engage children during play dates.
- "Why do we care about tweens?" said one document from 2020. "They are a valuable but untapped audience."
- Virtually every major social-media platform, including ByteDance Ltd.'s TikTok and YouTube, has confronted legal or regulatory problems related to how children use its products. Federal privacy law forbids data collection on children under 13, and lawmakers have criticized tech companies for not doing more to protect kids online from predators and harmful content.
- The Facebook documents show that competition from rivals, in particular [Snap](#) Inc.'s Snapchat and TikTok, is a motivating factor behind its work
- On Monday, Adam Mosseri, head of Instagram, said the company [would pause the development of a version of the app for children](#), often referred to as Instagram Kids. He said the company wanted time to talk to parents, experts and lawmakers before proceeding. He also contended that underage users would simply lie about their age to access Instagram if a version for children under the age of 13 wasn't available.
- Over the past five years, Facebook has made what it called "big bets" on designing products that would appeal to preteens across its services, according to a document from earlier this year.
- In more than a dozen studies over that period, the documents show, Facebook has tried to understand which products might resonate with children and "tweens" (ages 10 through 12), how these young people view competitors' apps and what concerns their parents



- “With the ubiquity of tablets and phones, kids are getting on the internet as young as six years old. We can’t ignore this and we have a responsibility to figure it out,” said a 2018 document labeled confidential. “Imagine a Facebook experience designed for youth.”
- Earlier this year, a senior researcher at Facebook presented to colleagues a new approach to how the company should think about designing products for children. It provided a blueprint for how to introduce the company’s products to younger children. Rather than offer just two types of products—those for users 13 and older, and a messenger app for kids—Facebook should tailor its features to six age brackets, said a slide titled “where we’ve been, and where we’re going.”
- The age brackets included: adults, late teens ages 16 to maturity, teens ages 13 to 15, tweens ages 10 to 12, children ages 5 to 9 and young kids ages zero to four.
- It isn’t uncommon for companies to pursue young people as customers. Yet the work is sensitive for the social-media giant: Facebook and Instagram prohibit children from using their apps before their teenage years, but the company’s future depends on ultimately recruiting them
- “If kids are under 13, they’re not allowed on Instagram and they should not be using our service,” said Mr. Mosseri in a written statement for this article. “It’s not new and it’s not a secret that social-media companies try to understand how teens and preteens use technology. Like all technology companies, of course, we want to appeal to the next generation, but that’s entirely different from the false assertion that we knowingly attempt to recruit people who aren’t old enough to use our apps
- Interest in Messenger Kids tapered off after age 10 and tweens viewed Facebook as a product for old people. They also weren’t yet interested in Instagram and what the document called its focus on “self-presentation.” Instagram was vulnerable to a challenge from Snapchat, which had a growing preteen following.
- “It’s fun, funny, silly and creative—seemingly made just for them,” the 2017 presentation said of Snapchat, warning that “signing up for social media is a given” for tweens. TikTok’s rise added to the pressure, with the main Facebook product no longer a serious contender among teens
- “Global teen penetration on FB is low, and acquisition appears to be slowing down,” a March 2021 document states. In the U.S., the daily number of teens using Facebook has fallen by 19% over the past two years, another document noted, and would likely fall by an additional 45% by 2023.
- A Pew Research Center survey from 2020 found that among 9-to-11-year-olds, 30% said they used TikTok, 22% said they used Snapchat, 11% said they used Instagram and 6% Facebook.
- Facebook is relying on Instagram to recruit young users in the hope that they’ll age into the company’s eponymous platform over time. A November 2020 presentation cited an eventual goal of pitching Facebook as the “Life Coach for Adulthood.”
- But researchers noted that posting by Instagram users had dropped significantly and that teens were spending two to three times more time on TikTok, according to one document.
- Keeping kids safe on social media is an industrywide issue. TikTok and YouTube have in the past few years each reached settlements for allegedly violating federal privacy laws protecting children, and have announced tighter rules since then to further protect young users. Both companies also have launched versions of their products designed especially for kids.
- Snapchat’s rules state users must be at least 13 years old, and the company has said it works to identify and terminate accounts for those under that age.
- There also are risks of children being exposed to adult content. A Journal investigation earlier this year showed that [TikTok’s algorithm serves videos containing sex and drugs](#) to accounts registered as minors. Facebook in 2019 said a design flaw allowed young people using Messenger Kids to enter group chats with strangers.
- We need to understand if this influence over preteen sharing holds at scale,” the researcher wrote in a document posted to Facebook’s internal message board early this year. “If it is common that teens are discouraging preteens from sharing, there are obvious implications for creation and the ecosystem both in the near and longer-term as preteens are the next generation coming onto the platform.” The presentation cited concern among teenagers about oversharing as a “myth” about Instagram.
- A Facebook team studying preteens set a three-year goal to figure out how to provide young people with social-media products built just for them. They noted that figuring out how to reach them would be just half the challenge. Convincing their parents that the products are safe would be the other half.

# Facebook's Documents About Instagram and Teens, Published

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-documents-instagram-teens-11632953840?mod=article\\_inline](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-documents-instagram-teens-11632953840?mod=article_inline)

Sept. 29, 2021 9:53 pm ET

- Facebook Inc. is scheduled to testify at a Senate hearing on Thursday about its products' effects on young people's mental health.
- Six of the documents that formed the basis of the Instagram article are published below. A person seeking whistleblower status has provided these documents to Congress. Facebook published two of these documents earlier Wednesday.
- Facebook has said the Journal's Instagram article mischaracterized its findings. In a blog post published 12 days after the article, the company's head of research said many teens "feel that using Instagram helps them when they are struggling with the kinds of hard moments and issues teenagers have always faced."

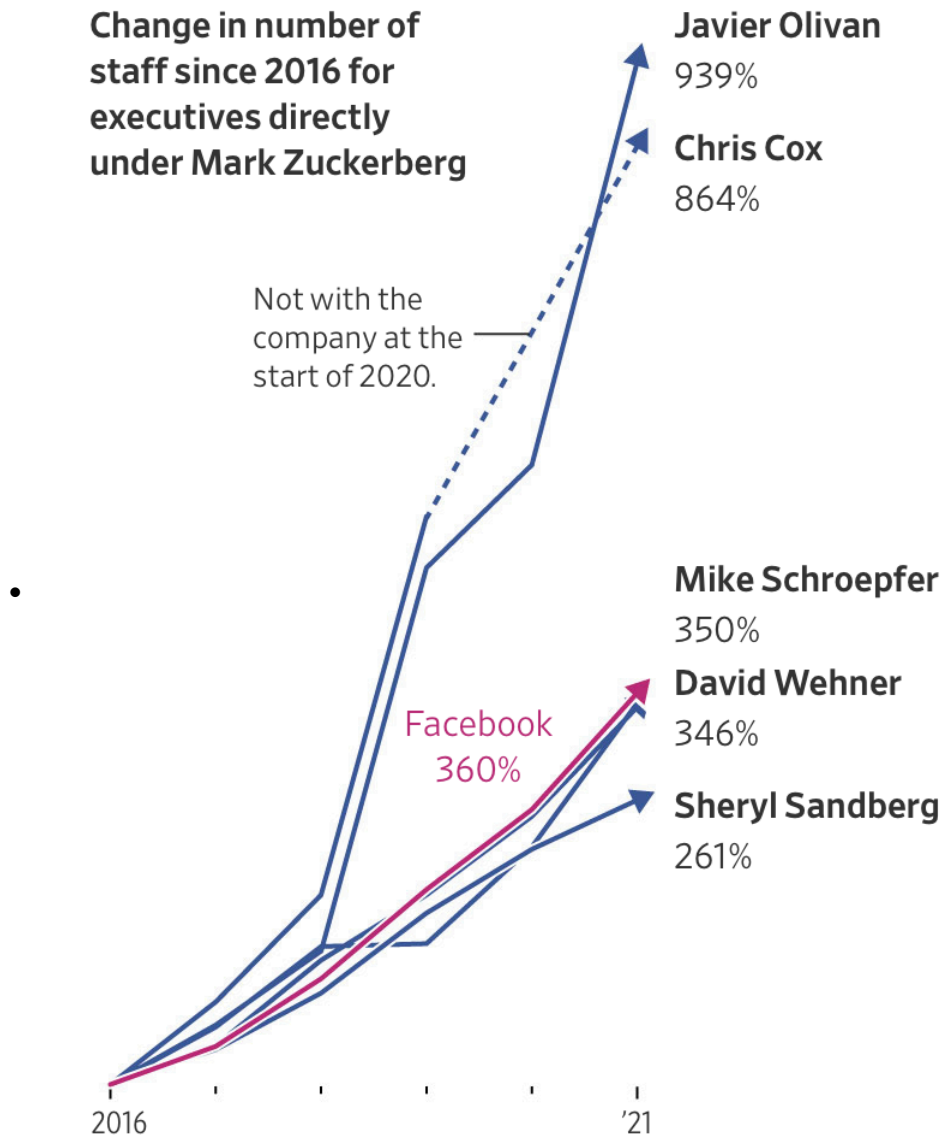
## Is Sheryl Sandberg's Power Shrinking? Ten Years of Facebook Data Offers Clues

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-employee-data-zuckerberg-sandberg-olivan-11633089498?mod=article\\_inline](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-employee-data-zuckerberg-sandberg-olivan-11633089498?mod=article_inline)

Oct. 1, 2021 8:05 am ET

- Javier Olivan, who oversees teams assigned to expand Facebook's user base and analyze activity on the platform, has had by far the biggest growth in staffers reporting up to him of all the executives who answer directly to Mr. Zuckerberg in recent years.
- Facebook's rolls of contract workers have grown even faster than its staff, numbering more than the company's own employees as of January 2019 and nearing 98,000 this year.
- Sheryl Sandberg, who is chief operating officer and has long been seen as Mr. Zuckerberg's No. 2, has had her share of Facebook's staff decline in recent years. Over the past year, though, the legal team, which is part of her portfolio, has grown about 60% faster than the company overall as Facebook confronts antitrust challenges, shareholder lawsuits and other legal problems.
- "Imputing Facebook's priorities based on the company's org chart is flawed and irresponsible. Many of our initiatives and projects run across different teams and functions, such as our work on privacy or the 40,000 people working on safety and security."
- The data show that teams reporting up through managers who oversee Facebook's products, analytics, advertising and marketing are growing at a much faster rate than Facebook overall. The expansion of the teams focused on growth has continued since the 2016 U.S. presidential election, a period when

Facebook also has emphasized its trust-and-safety efforts in response to [Russian interference](#) and [other problems on the platform](#).



Note: Chart doesn't include contract workers.

- The company has been adding contractors, known as “contingent workers,” even faster than it has been hiring staff employees. Ms. Sandberg oversees the largest group of contractors. More than 60% of the almost 98,000 contingent workers as of January report up to Ms. Sandberg, by that measure giving her oversight of the largest number of people working for Facebook. Mr. Osborne, the Facebook spokesman, said the Journal’s figure for contingent workers is inaccurate and incomplete, and declined to provide the company’s numbers.
- Many of those workers are responsible for reviewing content that has been flagged as potentially violating Facebook’s rules. Those moderator roles [are notoriously difficult because of the nature of some content](#), which can include violence and child exploitation.
- Though **Ms. Sandberg** remains a top figure at Facebook, recent data show her share of Facebook's staff employees this year at 31%. That doesn't include the growing army of contract workers she oversees.
- By the start of 2021, the proportion of Facebook's staff answering up through Chief Technology Officer **Mike Schroepfer** surpassed hers as the largest single block. He oversees engineers and coders. He said last month he will [step down from his role next year](#). The Facebook spokesman said more recent numbers show Ms. Sandberg has more employees reporting to her than any other top executive.

- The number of employees reporting to Messrs. **Olivan** and **Cox** has grown from a combined 15% of the total in 2014 to 31% this year, equivalent to the total for Ms. Sandberg.
- In addition to the growth teams, Mr. Olivan oversees many of the groups responsible for improving the quality and trustworthiness of content on Facebook, known as “integrity teams.” Among many other things, they monitor and measure objectionable content and develop tools to minimize or eliminate posts that users don’t want to see on the platform. Mr. Olivan’s teams often take on some of [the most complex and critical initiatives](#) for the company. He is one of the longest-serving executives at Facebook.
- One team reporting to Ms. Sandberg that is growing quickly is the legal team under Chief Legal Officer Jennifer Newstead. The number of employees reporting to Ms. Newstead, including staffers and contractors, increased by 74% in the year through January, reflecting the growing array of regulatory, legislative and legal fights.

# The Facebook Whistleblower, Frances Haugen, Says She Wants to Fix the Company, Not Harm It

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-whistleblower-frances-haugen-says-she-wants-to-fix-the-company-not-harm-it-11633304122?mod=article\\_inline](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-whistleblower-frances-haugen-says-she-wants-to-fix-the-company-not-harm-it-11633304122?mod=article_inline)

Oct. 3, 2021 7:36 pm ET

- The former [Facebook](#) Inc. employee who gathered documents that formed the foundation of [The Wall Street Journal’s Facebook Files series](#) said she acted to help prompt change at the social-media giant, not to stir anger toward it.
- Frances Haugen, a former product manager hired to help protect against election interference on Facebook, said she had grown frustrated by what she saw as the company’s lack of openness about its platforms’ potential for harm and unwillingness to address its flaws. She is scheduled to testify before Congress on Tuesday. She has also sought federal whistleblower protection with the Securities and Exchange Commission.
- In a series of interviews, Ms. Haugen, who left the company in May after nearly two years, said that she had come into the job with high hopes of helping Facebook fix its weaknesses. She soon grew skeptical that her team could make an impact, she said. Her team had few resources, she said, and she felt the company put growth and user engagement ahead of what it knew through its own research about its platforms’ ill effects.
- Ms. Haugen, 37 years old, resigned from Facebook in April. She stayed on another month to hand off some projects. She also sifted through the company’s internal social network, called Facebook Workplace, for instances where she believed the company had failed to be responsible about users’ welfare.
- She said she was surprised by what she found. The Journal’s series, based in part on the documents she gathered as well as interviews with current and former employees, describes how the company’s rules favor elites; how its algorithms foster discord; and how drug cartels and human traffickers use its

services openly. An article about Instagram's effects on teenage girls' mental health was the impetus for a Senate subcommittee hearing last week in which lawmakers described the disclosures as a "bombshell."

- Ms. Haugen kept expecting to be caught, she said, as she reviewed thousands of documents over several weeks. Facebook logs employees' activities on Workplace, and she was exploring parts of its network that, while open, weren't related to her job.
- Ms. Haugen previously worked at [Alphabet](#) Inc.'s Google, [Pinterest](#) Inc. and other social networks, specializing in designing algorithms and other tools that determine what content gets served to users.
- The friend, who had once held liberal political views, was spending increasing amounts of time reading online forums about how dark forces were manipulating politics. In an interview, the man recalled Ms. Haugen as having unsuccessfully tried to intervene as he gravitated toward a mix of the occult and white nationalism. He severed their friendship and left San Francisco before later abandoning such beliefs, he said.
- Ms. Haugen's health improved, and she went back to work. But the loss of her friendship changed the way she thought about social media, she said.
- When a Facebook recruiter got in touch at the end of 2018, Ms. Haugen said, she replied that she might be interested if the job touched on democracy and the spread of false information. During interviews, she said, she told managers about her friend and how she wanted to help Facebook prevent its own users from going down similar paths.
- She started in June 2019, part of the roughly 200-person Civic Integrity team, which focused on issues around elections world-wide. While it was a small piece of Facebook's overall policing efforts, the team became a central player in investigating how the platform could spread political falsehoods, stoke violence and be abused by malicious governments.
- Ms. Haugen was initially asked to build tools to study the potentially malicious targeting of information at specific communities. Her team, comprising her and four other new hires, was given three months to build a system to detect the practice, a schedule she considered implausible. She didn't succeed, and received a poor initial review, she said. She recalled a senior manager telling her that people at Facebook accomplish what needs to be done with far less resources than anyone would think possible.
- Around her, she saw small bands of employees confronting large problems. The core team responsible for detecting and combating human exploitation—which included slavery, forced prostitution and organ selling—included just a few investigators, she said.
- "I would ask why more people weren't being hired," she said. "Facebook acted like it was powerless to staff these teams."
- Ms. Haugen said the company seemed unwilling to accept initiatives to improve safety if that would make it harder to attract and engage users, discouraging her and other employees.
- "What did we do? We built a giant machine that optimizes for engagement, whether or not it is real," read a presentation from the Connections Integrity team, an umbrella group tasked with "shaping a healthy public content ecosystem," in the fall of 2019. The presentation described viral misinformation and societal violence as among the results.
- Ms. Haugen came to see herself and the Civic Integrity team as an understaffed cleanup crew.
- She worried about the dangers that Facebook might pose in societies gaining access to the internet for the first time, she said, and saw Myanmar's [social media-fueled genocide](#) as a template, not a fluke.
- On Dec. 2, 2020, the founder and chief of the team, Samidh Chakrabarti, called an all-hands teleconference meeting. From her San Francisco apartment, Ms. Haugen listened to him announce that Facebook was dissolving the team and shuffling its members into other parts of the company's integrity division, the broader group tasked with improving the quality and trustworthiness of the platform's content.
- That evening after the meeting, Ms. Haugen sent an encrypted text to a Journal reporter who had contacted her weeks earlier. Given her work on a team that focused in part on counterespionage, she was especially cautious and asked him to prove who he was.

- The U.S. Capitol riot came weeks later, and she said she was dismayed when Facebook publicly played down its connection to the violence despite widespread internal concern that its platforms were enabling dangerous social movements.
- Mr. Stone of Facebook called any implication that the company caused the riot absurd, noting the role of public figures in encouraging it. “We have a long track record of effective cooperation with law enforcement, including the agencies responsible for addressing threats of domestic terrorism,” he said.
- Ms. Haugen had expected there wouldn’t be much left on Facebook Workplace that wasn’t already either written about or hidden away. Workplace is a regular source of leaks, and for years the company has been tightening access to sensitive material.
- To her surprise, she found that attorney-client-privileged documents were posted in open forums. So were presentations to Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg —sometimes in draft form, with notes from top company executives included.
- To guide her review, Ms. Haugen said she traced the careers of colleagues she admired, tracking their experiments, research notes and proposed interventions. Often the work ended in frustrated “badge posts,” goodbye notes that included denunciations of Facebook’s failure to take responsibility for harms it caused, she said. The researchers’ career arcs became a framework for the material that would ultimately be provided to the SEC, members of Congress and the Journal.
- Ms. Haugen continued gathering material from inside Facebook through her last hour with access to the system. She reached out to lawyers at Whistleblower Aid, a Washington, D.C., nonprofit that represents people reporting corporate and government misbehavior.
- In addition to her coming Senate testimony and her SEC whistleblower claim, she said she’s interested in cooperating with state attorneys general and European regulators. While some have called for Facebook to be broken up or stripped of content liability protections, she disagrees. Neither approach would address the problems uncovered in the documents, she said—that despite numerous initiatives, Facebook didn’t address or make public what it knew about its platforms’ ill effects.
- In Ms. Haugen’s view, allowing outsiders to see the company’s research and operations is essential. She also argues for a radical simplification of Facebook’s systems and for limits on promoting content based on levels of engagement, a core feature of Facebook’s recommendation systems. The company’s own research has found that “misinformation, toxicity, and violent content are inordinately prevalent” in material reshared by users and promoted by the company’s own mechanics.
- “As long as your goal is creating more engagement, optimizing for likes, reshares and comments, you’re going to continue prioritizing polarizing, hateful content,” she said.

# Facebook Says AI Will Clean Up the Platform. Its Own Engineers Have Doubts.

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-ai-enforce-rules-engineers-doubtful-artificial-intelligence-11634338184?mod=article\\_inline](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-ai-enforce-rules-engineers-doubtful-artificial-intelligence-11634338184?mod=article_inline)

Oct. 17, 2021 9:17 am ET

- Facebook Inc. executives have long said that artificial intelligence would address the company’s chronic problems keeping what it deems hate speech and excessive violence as well as underage users off its platforms.
- That future is farther away than those executives suggest, according to internal documents reviewed by The Wall Street Journal. Facebook’s AI can’t consistently identify first-person shooting videos, racist rants and even, in one notable episode that puzzled internal researchers for weeks, the difference between cockfighting and car crashes.



- On hate speech, the documents show, Facebook employees have estimated the company removes only a sliver of the posts that violate its rules—a low-single-digit percent, they say. When Facebook’s algorithms aren’t certain enough that content violates the rules to delete it, the platform shows that material to users less often—but the accounts that posted the material go unpunished.
- The documents reviewed by the Journal also show that Facebook two years ago cut the time human reviewers focused on hate-speech complaints from users and made other tweaks that reduced the overall number of complaints. That made the company more dependent on AI enforcement of its rules and inflated the apparent success of the technology in its public statistics.
- According to the documents, those responsible for keeping the platform free from content Facebook deems offensive or dangerous acknowledge that the company is nowhere close to being able to reliably screen it.
- “The problem is that we do not and possibly never will have a model that captures even a majority of integrity harms, particularly in sensitive areas,” wrote a senior engineer and research scientist in a mid-2019 note.
- He estimated the company’s automated systems removed posts that generated just 2% of the views of hate speech on the platform that violated its rules. “Recent estimates suggest that unless there is a major change in strategy, it will be very difficult to improve this beyond 10-20% in the short-medium term,” he wrote.
- Facebook spokesman Andy Stone said that these percentages referred to posts that were removed using AI, and didn’t include other actions the company takes to reduce how many people view hate speech, including ranking posts lower in news feeds. Facebook says by that measure, the prevalence of content that violates its policies has been shrinking, and that is what the company considers its most important enforcement metric.
- The statistics contrast starkly with the confidence in AI presented by Facebook’s top executives, including CEO Mark Zuckerberg, who previously said he expected Facebook would use AI to detect “the vast majority of problematic content” by the end of 2019.
- Civil rights groups and academics have long been skeptical that the AI detection rate shows meaningful progress, saying it doesn’t seem to match user experiences or their own studies. “They won’t ever show their work,” said Rashad Robinson, president of the civil rights group Color of Change, which helped organize an advertiser boycott of Facebook last year due to what it called the company’s failure to control hate speech.
- In an interview, Facebook’s head of integrity, Guy Rosen, said it was more important to look at other data points that show the amount of hate speech shrinking as a percentage of what people see on the platform overall. Facebook says five out of every 10,000 content views contained hate speech, an improvement from roughly 10 of every 10,000 views in mid-2020, according to its latest public report on how it enforces its policies, for the second quarter of this year.
- “Prevalence is the most important metric, and it represents not what we caught, but what we missed, and what people saw, and it’s the primary metric we hold ourselves accountable to,” Mr. Rosen said. “We’ve been successful in moving it down, and it’s the one that we really focus on.”
- Facebook says it has spent about \$13 billion on “safety and security” since 2016, or nearly 4% of its revenue in that time. Mr. Rosen said that in 2016, Facebook’s content-moderation system relied largely on user complaints and that the company has since built AI tools to find the objectionable content.
- In 2018, Mr. Zuckerberg told a Senate committee that he was optimistic that within five to 10 years, Facebook would have the AI tools to proactively detect most hate speech. “Over the long term, building AI tools is going to be the scalable way to identify and root out most of this harmful content,” he said at the time.
- Facebook’s artificial-intelligence systems comb through billions of posts looking for items that might match the company’s definitions of content that violates its rules. The screening algorithms, called classifiers, are the bedrock of the company’s content-moderation system.
- In some areas, such as with spam, Facebook’s classifiers work relatively well. But they often fall short in sensitive and controversial areas, especially when Facebook’s rules are complex and cultural context matters, according to the documents and people familiar with the matter.

- Some employees say Facebook is misusing the classifiers, which they say are more effective as tools to flag broad problem areas than as the main tool for removing specific content problems.
- In 2019, documents reviewed by the Journal show, Facebook introduced “hate speech cost controls” to save money on its human content review operations. Review of hate speech by human staff was costing \$2 million a week, or \$104 million a year, according to an internal document covering planning for the first half of that year.
- Mr. Stone, the spokesman, said the funds were shifted to hire more people to train Facebook’s algorithms and that the overall budget stayed steady.
- It also introduced “friction” to the content reporting process, adding hoops for aggrieved users to jump through that sharply reduced how many complaints about content were made, according to the documents.
- The moves helped boost the company’s proactive detection rate, meaning, a greater proportion of the content that was removed was flagged by AI—the figure that is now nearly 98%. In December 2017, 24% of removed hate speech was detected by AI, and the rest from user reports, according to Facebook’s quarterly public report on how it enforces its policies.
- Mr. Stone said the moves to ignore user reports deemed unlikely to be violations and the addition of friction weren’t intended to change the proactive detection rate but instead were intended to make the system more efficient. He added that some of that additional friction has since been rolled back.
- “This is one of the hardest problems in machine learning,” said J. Nathan Matias, an assistant professor at Cornell University. “It’s also an area that so many companies and policy makers have just decided was going to be the solution—without understanding the problem.”
- The discrepancy between Facebook’s public claims about the effectiveness of its AI and the reality of the user experience has long puzzled researchers and other heavy users of the platform.
- “You refuse to even mention, let alone address, the problem Facebook has with white supremacists and bigots,” Ms. Gomez wrote in an Oct. 10, 2020, email to Ms. Sandberg and other executives, adding that there were plenty of Facebook groups “full of hate and lies that might lead to people being hurt or, even worse, killed.”
- “By hiding the problem and giving the opposite impression—that the issue is under control—they’re actually complicit in allowing those community violations to go forward with minimal accountability,” he said.
- In its quarterly public reports on how it enforces its policies, Facebook measures the prevalence of certain types of content, like hate speech, by the number of views that content attracts. The company says this is a more accurate way of measuring the true impact of a piece of content that violates its policies. In other words, hate speech viewed a million times is more of a problem than hate speech viewed just once.
- The company doesn’t publicly report what percentage of hate-speech views it removes. Internally, the company calculates this figure by applying their hate-speech classifiers to a sample of posts and then having humans review the same posts to see how much the classifiers missed, according to a person with direct knowledge of the estimates. The number is then used as an estimate for the amount of hate-speech views removed across the whole platform.
- In some cases, the AI didn’t recognize shootings. In others, it mislabeled innocuous videos, such as paintball games, or the carwash, the researchers wrote.
- The AI must also be trained in foreign languages.
- According to a December 2020 memo, Facebook employees debated creating a hate-speech classifier for various Arabic dialects. But the lack of training data—such as samples of the various dialects—was a problem, especially since they were having trouble with standard Arabic. “As it stands, they have barely enough content to train and maintain the Arabic classifier currently—let alone breakdowns,” one employee wrote in a document.
- The employee said that the company’s “seriously scant” list of slurs in the languages spoken in Afghanistan meant it could be missing many violating posts.
- In March, employees gearing up for regional elections in India said hate speech was a major risk in Assam, where there is growing violence against Muslims and other ethnic groups. “Assam is of particular

concern because we do not have an Assamese hate-speech classifier,” according to one planning document.

- While Facebook removes a tiny fraction of the content that violates its rules, executives are particularly sensitive to what it calls “over-enforcement,” or taking down too many posts that don’t actually violate hate-speech rules, according to people familiar with the matter. The emphasis on preventing those mistakes has pushed company engineers to train models that, in effect, allow for more hate speech on the platform to avoid false positives, according to the people.
- Its own internal research shows that Facebook users world-wide are more concerned about lack of enforcement. In March 2020, Facebook found that users, on average, rated seeing violating content like hate speech as a more negative experience than having their content taken down by mistake, according to the documents.
- Globally, users ranked inaccurate content removals last among a series of problems, while hate speech and violence topped the list. American users were more concerned by inaccurate removals, but still rated the problem behind hate speech and violence, the survey shows.
- In a late 2020 note, a departing data scientist noted that Facebook has a policy of allowing groups to sanction hate speech five times before they are removed from the platform. Because Facebook’s systems miss so much hate speech, the groups are likely to get away with far more, the data scientist wrote.
- “When you consider that we miss 95% of violating hate speech, you realize that it might actually take 100 violations for that group to accrue its five strikes,” he said in the note, which was previously reported by BuzzFeed.
- The outgoing data scientist noted that despite intense investment by Facebook, the company’s success rate at removing banned content remained dismal. “Each half [year] we make incremental progress on the amount of content we’re able to proactively detect,” he wrote. “But an incremental increase on a very small number is still a very small number.”
- “We might just be the very best in the world at it,” he wrote, “but the best in the world isn’t good enough to find a fraction of it.”

# How Many Users Does Facebook Have? The Company Struggles to Figure It Out

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-many-users-does-facebook-have-the-company-struggles-to-figure-it-out-11634846701?mod=hp\\_lead\\_pos4&mod=article\\_inline](https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-many-users-does-facebook-have-the-company-struggles-to-figure-it-out-11634846701?mod=hp_lead_pos4&mod=article_inline)

Oct. 21, 2021 4:05 pm ET

- Facebook Inc. is struggling to detect and deal with users' creating multiple accounts on its flagship platform, according to internal documents that raise new questions about how the social-media giant measures its audience.
- An internal Facebook presentation this spring called the phenomenon of single users with multiple accounts “very prevalent” among new accounts.
- The company's system for detecting such accounts also tends to undercount them, according to the presentation, which was viewed by The Wall Street Journal.
- A separate memo from May said that the number of U.S. Facebook users who are in their 20s and active at least once a month often exceeds the total population of Americans their age. ”

- The author added that the issue could render Facebook's ratio of users active each day "less trustable."
- At issue is the reliability of information that helps inform some big advertisers' spending decisions.
- Facebook said in its most recent quarterly securities filings that it estimates 11% of its monthly active users world-wide—which totaled 2.9 billion for its flagship platform in the second quarter—are duplicate accounts, with developing markets accounting for a higher proportion of them than developed ones.
- On its website for advertisers, Facebook says its estimate for an ad's audience size depends in part on the number of accounts users have, but it doesn't quantify the impact.
- Unlike Twitter Inc. and other platforms without such rules, the company requires users to have just one master account under a real name.
- Facebook says the policy helps prevent impersonation and scams.
- But data cited in the documents show that a quarter to a third of duplicates have been what Facebook calls "persistent SUMA," where a user continues to operate multiple accounts.

# Facebook Increasingly Suppresses Political Movements It Deems Dangerous

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-suppresses-political-movements-patriot-party-11634937358?mod=article\\_inline](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-suppresses-political-movements-patriot-party-11634937358?mod=article_inline)

Oct. 22, 2021 5:19 pm ET

- Reluctant to stifle viral content it helps amplify, the social-media giant is playing whack-a-mole with groups it believes are potentially harmful
- The surgical strike was part of a strategy Facebook adopted early this year to stop what it calls “harmful communities” from gaining traction on its platform before they spread too far. Rather than just taking action against posts that violate its rules, or that originate with actors such as Russia-based trolls, Facebook began putting its thumb on the scale against communities it deemed to be a problem. In April, based on the same policy, it took aim at a German conspiracy movement called Querdenken.
- Internal Facebook documents, part of an array of company communications reviewed by the Journal for its Facebook Files series, show that people inside the company have long discussed a different, more systematic approach to restrict features that disproportionately amplify incendiary and divisive posts. The company rejected those efforts because they would impede the platform’s usage and growth.
- The reality is that Facebook is making decisions on an ad hoc basis, in essence playing whack-a-mole with movements it deems dangerous. By taking on the role of refereeing public discourse, Facebook has strayed from the public commitment to neutrality long espoused by Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg.
- And because of the enormous size of its global user base—the latest count is about 2.9 billion—its decisions about whom to silence, with no public disclosure or right of appeal, can have great impact.
- The issue sits in the middle of one of the most sensitive debates around Facebook. Activists on the left have been urging the company to more forcefully block what they see as harmful content. Other activists, largely on the right, accuse Facebook of censorship directed at conservative voices.
- “It’s understandable that the immense pressure on tech companies would push them to develop aggressive solutions to combat misinformation,” Mr. Perault said. “But predictive, behavioral censorship seems fraught. In the absence of data suggesting otherwise, I think it’s appropriate to be skeptical that the benefits will outweigh the costs.”

- Facebook spokesman Drew Pusateri acknowledged the tension in the company's work to combat dangerous viral social movements. "To find those solutions, we've had to invent new technologies and balance difficult trade-offs that society has struggled with for a long time, and without needed guidance from lawmakers and regulators," he said. "We know our solutions will never be perfect, but stories like these exist precisely because we confronted our toughest problems head-on."
- A senior security official at Facebook said the company would seek to disrupt on-platform movements only if there was compelling evidence that they were the product of tightly knit circles of users connected to real-world violence or other harm and committed to violating Facebook's rules.
- One challenge for the company has been balancing concern about fairness with recent history, in which groups such as foreign trolls and small conspiracy movements have used Facebook to get their message out to millions of people.
- The targeted approach has been controversial within Facebook. Documents show employees have long championed "content agnostic" changes to the platform, which were both technically easier and less likely to raise free-speech concerns.
- If the company didn't dial back on automated recommendations and design features that disproportionately spread false and inflammatory posts, what he called "rampant harmful virality" could undermine Facebook's efforts to prevent the spread of toxic content before the 2020 election.
- "There's a growing set of research showing that some viral channels are used for bad more than they are used for good," he wrote in one note. Facebook wouldn't have to eliminate virality to deal with the problem, he said, just dial it back.
- Those suggestions were met with praise from other employees, the documents show, but generally didn't get traction with executives, leaving the ad hoc approach as the company's main weapon. A Facebook spokesman said the company took such concerns seriously, and that it adopted a proposal Mr. Jin championed to stop recommending users join groups related to health or political topics, and had taken steps to slow the growth of newly created groups.
- Executives were slow to think about the downsides and what to do about them. "For the first 10 years of the company, everyone was just focused on the positive," Mr. Zuckerberg said in a 2018 interview with Vox.
- The 2016 U.S. election changed that. Revelations of foreign interference, bot networks and false information left the company scrambling to identify how its platform could be abused and how to prevent it.
- Its researchers found that company systems automatically and disproportionately spread harmful content, the internal documents show. Whatever content was shared, Facebook would recommend and spread a more incendiary mix.
- Particularly troublesome were heavy users, the kind of voices that Facebook's algorithm had long helped amplify. In at least nine experiments and analyses beginning in 2017, Facebook researchers found links popular with heavy users were disproportionately associated with false information and hyperpartisan content, the documents show.
- "Pages that share misinformation tend to post at much higher rate than other pages with similar audience size," one research note states.
- Researchers also found that efforts to boost the "relevance" of Facebook's News Feed were making the platform's problems with bad content worse.
- In dozens of experiments and analyses reviewed by the Journal, Facebook researchers, data scientists and engineers found viral content favored conspiracy theories, hate speech and hoaxes. And they discovered that as the speed and length of the sharing chain grew, so did the odds that content was toxic.
- The documents show that employees pushed for the company to confront its reliance on virality, but that its leaders resisted.
- One engineer in 2019 suggested killing the reshare button, which let users quickly spread posts across Facebook. Other suggestions were more incremental: to stop promoting reshared content unless it was from a close friend of the user; to moderately slow the platform's fastest-moving posts; or to lower the limit on daily group invitations from 2,250 a day.

- Facebook data scientists intensified their scrutiny of viral problems during the 2020 election run-up, putting in place measures to analyze how fast harmful content was spreading. They found the company had inadvertently made changes that worsened viral problems.
- In Facebook's internal communications system, called Workplace, Mr. Jin, Mr. Zuckerberg's former schoolmate, said research suggested Facebook was in the wrong part of the "virality tradeoff curve." He championed measures to damp virality on the platform. Many colleagues agreed that one attractive part of his suggestion was that slowing down the spread of viral information would affect everyone, no matter where they are on the political spectrum. It would help the company avoid the accusations of bias that comes when it targets a specific group.
- Mr. Jin ran into skepticism from John Hegeman, Facebook's head of ads. At the time, Mr. Hegeman oversaw recommendations in Facebook's News Feed. He agreed with Mr. Jin's assertion that Facebook's systems appeared to magnify its content problems. But he contended that most viral content is OK, and asked whether it would be fair, or wise, to cut back.
- "If we remove a small percentage of reshares from people's inventory," he wrote, "they decide to come back to Facebook less."
- In each case, the documents indicate, Facebook's tools turbocharged the growth of those movements, and the company stepped in to fight them only after they led to real-world violence or other harms. That thrust it repeatedly into messy arguments about whether its controls over speech on the platform were insufficient or overbearing and biased.
- The company tried slowing its platform, but only as a temporary, emergency response, part of what Facebook referred to internally as "Break the Glass" measures. It first did so when false claims of election fraud took off in the immediate wake of the U.S. presidential election, then after the Jan. 6 riot.
- In most cases, the company rolled those measures back afterward, according to the documents.
- Some movements are following Facebook's rules but also spreading content the company deems "inherently harmful and violates the spirit of our policy," one Facebook researcher wrote. "What do we do when that authentic movement espouses hate or delegitimizes free elections? These are some of the questions we're trying to answer."
- Internal reviews of Facebook's performance around the election's aftermath pointed to the company's inability to keep pace with the speed of its own platform or separate out skepticism of the voting results from incitements to violence.
- First reported by BuzzFeed News, one internal report acknowledged that Facebook had been unable to reliably catch harmful content that goes viral, with the broader Stop the Steal movement "seeping through the cracks" of Facebook's enforcement systems.
- Facebook's strategy for dealing with movements it considers harmful are outlined in a series of internal documents from early this year, from a multidisciplinary group within the company called the Disaggregating Harmful Networks Taskforce.
- Facebook scientists studied how such networks rise, and identified "information corridors"—networks of accounts, pages and groups—that create, distribute and amplify potentially harmful content. The networks span hundreds of thousands of users. Mapping them required artificial intelligence to identify users "most at risk of being pulled into the problematic community," according to one document.

# Facebook Services Are Used to Spread Religious Hatred

# in India, Internal Documents Show

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-services-are-used-to-spread-religious-hatred-in-india-internal-documents-show-11635016354?mod=article\\_inline](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-services-are-used-to-spread-religious-hatred-in-india-internal-documents-show-11635016354?mod=article_inline)

Oct. 23, 2021 3:12 pm ET

- Inflammatory content on Facebook spiked 300% above previous levels at times during the months following December 2019, a period in which religious protests swept India, researchers wrote in a July 2020 report that was reviewed by The Wall Street Journal.
- Rumors and calls to violence spread particularly on Facebook's WhatsApp messaging service in late February 2020, when communal violence in Delhi left 53 dead, according to the report.
- Hindu and Muslim users in India say they are subjected to "a large amount of content that encourages conflict, hatred and violence on Facebook and WhatsApp," such as material blaming Muslims for the spread of Covid-19 and assertions that Muslim men are targeting Hindu women for marriage as a "form of Muslim takeover" of the country, the researchers found.
- The researchers recommended one of the organizations be kicked off for violating the company's hate speech rules, according to one report, but the group remains active.
- The other group, researchers said, promotes incitements to violence including "dehumanizing posts comparing Muslims to 'pigs' and 'dogs' and misinformation claiming the Quran calls for men to rape their female family members."
- That group also remains active on Facebook, and wasn't designated as dangerous due to "political sensitivities," the report said.
- The reports show that Facebook is privately aware that people in its largest market are targeted with inflammatory content, and that users say the company isn't protecting them.
- Facebook spokesman Andy Stone declined to comment on the Hindu nationalist groups' activities on Facebook, but said that the company bans groups or individuals "after following a careful, rigorous, and multidisciplinary process."
- India's government has threatened to jail employees of Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter Inc. if they didn't comply with data or take-down requests, the Journal reported in February, as authorities sought to quash political protests and control speech on foreign- owned tech platforms.
- India's Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology didn't respond to requests for comment at the time, and later disputed the Journal's reporting.
- The country of more than 1.3 billion has deep social and religious divisions that periodically erupt into fatal confrontations.
- Researchers also found pro-RSS users on Facebook were posting a high volume of content about "Love Jihad," a conspiracy theory that is spreading online and has gained traction in recent years.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi worked for the RSS for decades.
- In a separate report this year, researchers said another Hindu nationalist organization called the Bajrang Dal had previously used WhatsApp to "organize and incite violence."
- An RSS spokesman declined to comment on Facebook's internal documents.
- Asked about the internal Facebook reports, a spokesman for the Bajrang Dal said its members don't promote hate speech on Facebook. "
- The Journal reported last year that Facebook's top public-policy executive in India opposed applying Facebook's hate-speech rules to a Hindu nationalist politician, along with at least three other Hindu nationalist individuals and groups flagged internally for promoting or participating in violence, according to current and former employees.
- The company last month announced the appointment of a new head of public policy in India.



# Facebook's Internal Chat Boards Show Politics Often at Center of Decision Making

[https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-politics-decision-making-documents-11635100195?mod=article\\_inline](https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-politics-decision-making-documents-11635100195?mod=article_inline)

Oct. 24, 2021 2:34 pm ET

- Many Republicans, from Mr. Trump down, say Facebook discriminates against conservatives. The documents reviewed by the Journal didn't render a verdict on whether bias influences its decisions overall. They do show that employees and their bosses have hotly debated whether and how to restrain right-wing publishers, with more-senior employees often providing a check on agitation from the rank and file. The documents viewed by the Journal, which don't capture all of the employee messaging, didn't mention equivalent debates over left-wing publications.
- Other documents also reveal that Facebook's management team has been so intently focused on avoiding charges of bias that it regularly places political considerations at the center of its decision making.
- Facebook employees, as seen in a large quantity of internal message-board conversations, have agitated consistently for the company to act against far-right sites. In many cases, they have framed their arguments around Facebook's enforcement of its own rules, alleging that Facebook is giving the right-wing publishers a pass to avoid PR blowback. As one employee put it in an internal communication: "We're scared of political backlash if we enforce our policies without exemptions."
- Right-wing sites are consistently among the best-performing publishers on the platform in terms of engagement, according to data from research firm NewsWhip. That is one reason Facebook also is criticized by people on the left, who say Facebook's algorithms reward far-right content.
- Facebook says it enforces its rules equally and doesn't consider politics in its decision making.
- In many of the documents reviewed by the Journal, employees discussed whether Facebook was enforcing its rules evenly across the political spectrum. They said the company was allowing conservative sites to skirt the company's fact-checking rules, publish untrustworthy and offensive content and harm the tech giant's relationship with advertisers, according to records from internal Facebook message boards.
- In a farewell memo to colleagues in late 2020, a staffer in Facebook's integrity team, which seeks to mitigate harmful behavior on the platform, said Breitbart was undermining the company's efforts to fight hate speech.
- "We make special exceptions to our written policies for them, and we even explicitly endorse them by including them as trusted partners in our core products," the staffer said of Breitbart.
- Breitbart was included in News Tab, which was launched in 2019. The product contains a main tier with curated news from publishers including The Wall Street Journal, New York Times and Washington Post, which are paid for their content. Breitbart is part of a second tier of news designed to deliver news tailored to a user's interest, and isn't paid.
- Facebook said it requires sites included on News Tab to focus on quality news reporting and bars those that repeatedly share what it deems misinformation or violate its public list of community standards.
- Asked about the inclusion of Breitbart, Facebook Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg said in an interview at the time of the launch that the aim was for News Tab to have a diversity of perspectives.
- An August 2019 study by Facebook researchers found that Breitbart was the least trusted news source of the several dozen it looked at across the U.S. and Great Britain, according to a chart from the study

reviewed by the Journal. The study, which also ranked news sources based on quality, also classified Breitbart as “low-quality.”

- A Breitbart spokeswoman said the company’s content was far more accurate and more popular with Facebook’s own users than the mainstream news media competitors that Facebook pays for content.
- Facebook’s relationship with Breitbart has also come under fire from advertisers and the employees who work on ad sales. In 2018, one employee working on the Facebook Audience Network, a group of third-party publishers for whom Facebook sells advertising, argued that Facebook should drop Breitbart from the network.
- After the 2016 election, advertisers started looking to avoid Breitbart, which delighted in provoking the left with anti-PC rhetoric and nationalism that critics called racist. In the automated ad system, even if an advertiser didn’t specifically seek to advertise on Breitbart, its ads could appear there.
- Many advertisers sought to ensure their ads didn’t appear on Breitbart by taking advantage of a Facebook Audience Network feature that allowed them to block specific websites, the employee wrote, but the tactic wasn’t proving effective.
- “Breitbart tries to work around every control that we put in place, so we have to block at the platform level,” the employee quoted an unnamed advertiser as saying, conveying the client’s dissatisfaction.
- Facebook took steps to damp the spread of what it deemed misinformation in users’ feeds after the 2016 election. That included a tool called “Sparing Sharing,” which targeted “hyperposters,” or accounts that post very frequently. It reduced the reach of their posts, since data had shown these users disproportionately shared false and incendiary information.
- Mr. Kaplan ordered more studies analyzing how enforcement efforts were implemented for different ideologies as Facebook increasingly faced the charge that it was suppressing conservative voices, one of the people familiar with the matter said.
- In 2020, a Facebook engineer gathered up a list of examples he said were evidence that Facebook routinely declines to enforce its own content moderation rules for big far-right publishers like Breitbart, Charlie Kirk, PragerU and Diamond and Silk, according to the documents.
- According to the engineer’s list of examples, the content producers were “managed partners,” part of a program in which Facebook assigns internal handlers to prominent users. A side benefit for these users, the engineer alleged, was that their liaison at Facebook helped them avoid punishment over fact-checking strikes, according to the documents.
- “We are apparently providing hate-speech-policy-consulting and consequence-mitigation services to select partners,” wrote one. “Leadership is scared of being accused of bias,” wrote another.
- Facebook executives dropped into the chat to explain fact-checking policies and how the managed partner program worked but didn’t address the questions about bias, according to the chat records.

#### **FACEBOOK AND BIG TOBACCO**

<https://www.wsj.com/video/series/joanna-stern-personal-technology/facebook-and-big-tobacco-why-social-media-is-and-isnt-like-cigarettes/62FA8A1C-C17E-4F9D-98E2-BB79587E9626>

- WSJ journalist states that since congress is making similarities between these two industries due to the addiction that social media has especially on kids.
- Tobacco regulation can be considered as a starting point for regulation that could be imposed on FB.