

# Facebook and the Structural Degradation of Social Reality: Advertising, Attention, and Civilizational Risk

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## Abstract

This paper presents a structural analysis of Facebook as an advertising-driven platform whose core business model produces systematic social harm. Drawing on political economy, media theory, cognitive science, and systems-level thermodynamic reasoning, it argues that Facebook does not merely host harmful content but actively degrades social reality through failure-compatible advertising, attention extraction, and the erosion of long-horizon cognitive and embodied capabilities.

The analysis integrates qualitative experience, comparative media history, and existing empirical literature to show that advertising saturation, short-form algorithmic media, and virtualized social interaction jointly form a stable extraction regime. This regime monetizes aspiration under constraint, decouples visibility from legitimacy, and favors high-entropy attentional states incompatible with skill transmission, knowledge reproduction, and future capacity.

At civilizational scale, these dynamics pose a risk of irreversible competence loss and cultural thinning. The paper advances a thermodynamic and constraint-based framework for understanding platform stability and harm, and proposes a research agenda for empirically testing the claims. Rather than a moral critique, the argument is structural: Facebook persists not despite its harms, but because those harms are profitable.

## 1 Introduction

Contemporary use of Facebook is increasingly characterized by advertising saturation. Estimates vary, but observational studies and user reports consistently indicate that advertisements now constitute a substantial fraction of visible content, often approaching or exceeding one-third of items in a typical feed. This density represents a sharp departure from historical media forms, including broadcast television, print newspapers, and radio, where advertising was constrained by format, regulation, and cost.

The experiential consequence is not merely annoyance. Users report spending significant effort blocking advertisements, hiding posts, and reporting fraudulent pages in an attempt to preserve minimal coherence within their feeds. This unpaid defensive labor does not alter platform dynamics. It allows individual mitigation while leaving aggregate outcomes unchanged.

This paper advances the claim that Facebook’s harms are not accidental side effects of scale, misuse, or inadequate moderation. They are structural consequences of an advertising system

optimized for extraction rather than exchange. The platform’s incentive structure rewards visibility decoupled from legitimacy, promotes failure-compatible advertising, and systematically favors high-turnover, high-entropy forms of attention.

The argument proceeds in three stages. First, it situates Facebook within the historical evolution of advertising and media regulation, showing how platform advertising represents a break with prior legitimacy constraints. Second, it analyzes the psychological, economic, and epistemic effects of advertising saturation, short-form media, and virtualized sociality. Third, it develops a systems-level interpretation grounded in constraint dynamics and thermodynamic analogies, connecting individual experience to civilizational risk.

## **2 Methodology and Positionality**

This paper adopts a structural systems approach rather than an agent-centered or purely cultural analysis. Its primary concern is not individual intent, moral character, or isolated user behavior, but the stability conditions and reproduction dynamics of platform-mediated social environments.

The analysis draws on multiple sources of evidence. It incorporates qualitative observation derived from long-term user experience and platform-oriented ethnographic reflection, engages with existing empirical research in media studies, cognitive science, and political economy, and situates contemporary platform dynamics within a comparative historical analysis of earlier media and advertising regimes. These strands are integrated through formal reasoning drawn from systems theory and thermodynamic analogy, which provides a unifying framework for interpreting stability, extraction, and irreversibility across scales.

The paper does not claim privileged access to internal platform data. Instead, it treats Facebook as an observable system whose large-scale effects can be inferred from public behavior, documented incentives, and persistent outcomes. Where empirical uncertainty exists, claims are framed probabilistically rather than deterministically.

Normative judgments are not avoided, but they are subordinated to descriptive structure. The core question is not whether Facebook’s practices are ethically objectionable, but whether they are stable, profitable, and reproducible under existing constraints. Moral evaluation follows from, rather than substitutes for, structural explanation.

## **3 Literature Review and Theoretical Lineage**

The argument developed here intersects several established literatures without fully belonging to any single one.

In political economy, it builds on analyses of surveillance capitalism and platform capitalism, which document how digital platforms extract value from behavioral data and network effects. However, the present work shifts emphasis from data extraction to attention extraction and failure-compatible advertising dynamics.

In media theory, it aligns with media ecological approaches that treat communication technologies as environments shaping cognition and social organization. Unlike purely cultural critiques,

this paper foregrounds constraint, reproduction, and irreversibility.

Cognitive science contributes findings on attention, working memory, reward systems, and skill acquisition, particularly the distinction between short-horizon stimulation and long-horizon learning. These findings are integrated into a systems framework rather than treated as isolated psychological effects.

The paper also draws on theories of embodied cognition and tacit knowledge, which emphasize the irreducibility of physical co-presence and practice in skill transmission. This literature grounds the claim that virtual interaction cannot substitute for embodied social reproduction.

Finally, the thermodynamic and constraint-based interpretation draws inspiration from systems theory, complexity science, and entropy-based models of organization. These frameworks provide formal language for describing why high-entropy attentional regimes are individually attractive yet collectively destructive, and why such regimes remain stable despite widespread dissatisfaction.

Together, these literatures motivate a unified claim: Facebook’s harms arise not from cultural pathology or individual weakness, but from a structurally stable extraction system that trades long-term capacity for short-term profit.

## 4 Advertising Without Legitimacy

Advertising has not historically been an unconstrained activity. In pre-digital economies, commercial legitimacy was mediated by multiple layers of friction: guild systems, professional licensing, geographic locality, reputational memory, and regulatory oversight. Even where fraud existed, it was costly, localized, and difficult to scale.

In the twentieth century, mass media advertising introduced new risks while also imposing new constraints. Broadcast television and radio were subject to licensing regimes and content regulation. Print advertising relied on durable outlets whose reputations could be damaged by persistent deception. Consumer protection institutions, including the Federal Trade Commission and Better Business Bureaus, emerged to enforce minimum standards of truthfulness and accountability.

Platform advertising represents a qualitative break from these regimes. Facebook enables advertising that is anonymous, ephemeral, globally scalable, and algorithmically targeted. An advertiser may create a page, purchase visibility, make unverifiable claims, and disappear entirely within days. Enforcement mechanisms are weak, reactive, and structurally downstream of profit extraction.

This shift is not merely technological; it is legal. Platform operators benefit from liability protections that sharply distinguish between hosting content and producing it. In practice, this distinction collapses when platforms algorithmically optimize distribution, pricing, and targeting of advertisements. Yet responsibility remains externalized.

The result is an advertising environment dominated by categories that could not historically scale: dropshipping schemes with no durable supply chain, speculative financial products, fake educational credentials, miracle health claims, and aspirational lifestyle branding untethered from production or skill. These advertisers do not represent market failure. They represent the ideal participant in a failure-compatible system.

Available evidence suggests that the majority of small advertisers on such platforms do not

achieve positive returns on investment. High churn among advertisers is not a problem for the platform; it is a feature. Losses are dispersed across many actors, while platform revenue aggregates steadily. Advertising becomes a one-way transfer rather than a reciprocal exchange.

## 5 Failure-Compatible Advertising

In traditional markets, advertiser failure threatens the medium. A newspaper that systematically bankrupts its advertisers loses future revenue. Platform advertising decouples these dynamics. Profitability no longer depends on advertiser success, only on continued belief that success is possible.

This belief is actively cultivated. Platform interfaces emphasize reach, impressions, and potential growth while obscuring base rates of failure. Advertisers are encouraged to experiment, iterate, and reinvest, often without access to meaningful benchmarks or counterfactuals.

From a systems perspective, Facebook operates less like a market and more like a distributed loss-absorption mechanism. Each advertiser absorbs a small probability-weighted loss. The platform captures the aggregate surplus. Structural insulation ensures that failure does not feed back negatively on the system.

This architecture selects for advertisers willing to gamble rather than those seeking stable, long-term relationships with customers. Deception, exaggeration, and implausible promises become rational strategies under such conditions.

## 6 Selling Hope Under Constraint

The moral gravity of platform advertising emerges most clearly under conditions of scarcity. Behavioral economics has repeatedly shown that decision-making under constraint differs systematically from decision-making under abundance. Scarcity narrows temporal horizons, increases susceptibility to framing effects, and amplifies responsiveness to promises of rapid relief.

Facebook’s advertising ecosystem is optimized for precisely these conditions. Users experiencing economic pressure are repeatedly exposed to narratives of sudden transformation: passive income, side hustles, instant credentials, lifestyle upgrades. These narratives do not require plausibility to function. They require resonance with constrained aspiration.

This dynamic parallels well-documented forms of predatory inclusion. Payday lending, rent-to-own schemes, and multi-level marketing all exploit asymmetries between need and opportunity. They do not exclude the poor; they monetize them. Platform advertising extends this logic into the domain of attention and identity.

The same mechanism operates on advertisers themselves. Small operators, precarious workers, and aspiring entrepreneurs are invited to substitute visibility for capital, trust, or skill. The platform sells the belief that success can be purchased quickly, without long training horizons or institutional support.

From a class perspective, these effects are stratified. Higher-income users experience advertising as nuisance or noise. Lower-income users experience it as persistent pressure: a continuous

presentation of unreachable possibilities framed as individual opportunity. The psychological cost is not envy alone, but the erosion of realistic planning.

## 7 Hope Extraction as a Structural Mechanism

Hope extraction may be defined as the systematic monetization of aspiration under conditions where realization is statistically unlikely. Unlike traditional exploitation, which extracts labor or material resources, hope extraction operates on expectation itself.

This mechanism is measurable in principle. Relevant indicators include advertiser churn rates examined in relation to overall platform revenue, the distribution of return on advertising spend across income or firm-size brackets, correlations between indicators of user financial stress and levels of advertising engagement, and the continued prevalence of advertising categories characterized by implausible promises despite persistently low fulfillment or conversion rates.

The significance of hope extraction is not merely economic. Aspirational depletion alters subjective time horizons. When individuals repeatedly invest attention and money in improbable outcomes, long-horizon strategies—education, skill acquisition, collective organization—become less salient.

In this way, Facebook’s advertising system does not merely reflect existing inequality. It actively reshapes how inequality is experienced and navigated. Constraint is individualized, failure is internalized, and structural conditions remain opaque.

This concludes the analysis of advertising as a legitimacy-free extraction system. The next sections examine how short-form algorithmic media and virtualized social interaction amplify these dynamics by restructuring attention, cognition, and skill transmission.

## 8 Short-Form Media and the Collapse of Long-Horizon Attention

In parallel with advertising saturation, Facebook has increasingly prioritized short-form, algorithmically curated video content, most prominently through the promotion of *Reels*. This shift is commonly justified as a response to user demand or competitive pressure. Such explanations obscure the structural role of short-form media within extraction-driven platforms.

Short-form feeds are optimized to maximize immediate engagement. Content is selected for its capacity to arrest attention within seconds, elicit rapid affective response, and yield quick replacement. The design presupposes that each item is largely independent of context, narrative continuity, or future consequence.

This optimization regime systematically disadvantages long-horizon cognitive activities. Reading extended texts, following complex arguments, learning mathematics or physics, acquiring technical skills, or engaging in sustained creative practice all require delayed reward, tolerance of ambiguity, and continuity over time. These properties are directly antagonistic to high-frequency novelty systems.

Attention is finite. Time and cognitive energy allocated to rapid, algorithmically optimized stimuli necessarily displace time that could be devoted to slower forms of learning. The harm is

therefore not merely distraction but opportunity erosion. Capacities not exercised at scale atrophy.

## 9 Neuroscience of Attention and Reward

Cognitive neuroscience provides a partial account of why short-form media is so effective and so corrosive. Sustained attention relies on working memory, executive control, and the ability to maintain task-relevant representations over time. These systems are metabolically expensive and fragile under interruption.

Short-form feeds exploit reward prediction mechanisms associated with dopaminergic signaling. Variable reward schedules—unpredictable novelty, intermittent reinforcement, rapid feedback—produce strong engagement while diminishing sensitivity to slower, more effortful rewards. Over time, habituation occurs: greater stimulation is required to achieve the same subjective effect.

Importantly, these mechanisms do not merely affect mood or preference. They reshape attentional baselines. Activities that do not provide rapid feedback increasingly feel aversive. Reading, study, and practice come to be experienced as unusually effortful rather than intrinsically valuable.

Longitudinal evidence suggests that heavy exposure to fragmented media environments correlates with reduced sustained attention and diminished tolerance for cognitive delay. While causal pathways remain under investigation, the directional pressure exerted by platform design is clear.

## 10 Comparative Media Perspective

Short-form algorithmic media differs qualitatively from earlier mass media. Television imposed passive consumption but maintained temporal continuity: programs had beginnings, middles, and ends. Books demanded sustained engagement but offered depth and cumulative understanding. Even video games, often criticized for addictive qualities, typically require skill acquisition, strategy, and persistence.

Reels-style feeds eliminate continuity altogether. Each item competes in isolation. Narrative, skill, and context are liabilities. This is not merely faster media; it is media stripped of temporal structure.

The civilizational significance of this shift lies in what becomes statistically unlikely. Knowledge-intensive activities persist only when environments support them. A media ecosystem that systematically favors fragmentation will not eliminate books, study, or craft—but it will render them marginal.

## 11 Algorithmic Novelty as Entropic Pressure

The effects described above can be formalized using the language of entropy. While care must be taken not to conflate physical thermodynamics with cognitive processes, the structural analogy is informative.

Entropy, in a broad informational sense, measures dispersion, unpredictability, and the loss of coherent structure. High-entropy systems exhibit rapid state transitions and minimal memory.

Low-entropy systems preserve continuity and constrain future states.

Short-form algorithmic feeds function as high-entropy attentional environments. Each interaction induces a state change largely independent of prior context. Memory requirements are minimal. Integration across time is discouraged. Novelty is continuously injected to prevent settling into stable states.

By contrast, learning a skill, reading a book, or practicing a craft constitutes a low-entropy trajectory. These activities require repeated engagement with the same structures, accumulation of partial understanding, and tolerance of delayed payoff.

Platforms optimized for attention extraction favor high-entropy regimes because they maximize turnover and capture. However, high-entropy attention is poorly suited for building internal models of the world. It produces stimulation without structure.

## 12 Selection Effects and Cognitive Ecology

At scale, these dynamics produce selection effects. Practices compatible with fragmented attention proliferate. Practices requiring continuity decline. This is not a matter of individual choice alone but of ecological pressure.

Cognitive ecologies shape which behaviors are viable. When environments reward rapid engagement and penalize delay, individuals adapt. Over time, populations converge toward behaviors that minimize cognitive friction within the prevailing system.

The platform does not need to suppress books, education, or skill acquisition. It merely needs to render them energetically expensive relative to alternatives. Under such conditions, decline is gradual, uneven, and difficult to perceive—until cumulative effects become visible.

The next section examines why virtual social interaction cannot compensate for this loss, and how the displacement of embodied practice threatens the very notion of intergenerational skill transference.

## 13 Virtual Connection and the Limits of Social Substitution

A central defense of social media platforms is that they provide connection: maintaining relationships across distance, enabling communication, and mitigating isolation. These claims are partially true but structurally incomplete. Virtual connection is not a general substitute for embodied social interaction.

Many forms of knowledge transmission are irreducibly physical. Mathematics and physics require sustained instruction and disciplined practice. Repair, construction, and maintenance require tools, materials, and tactile feedback. Electrical and plumbing systems demand interaction with physical constraints. Cooking requires sensory judgment, timing, and embodied skill. Care requires presence, responsiveness, and shared vulnerability. Art and music require practice, feedback, and bodily coordination.

These competencies cannot be acquired through passive consumption or symbolic affirmation. They are learned through shared activity in a material world governed by error, resistance, and

consequence.

Virtual interaction may supplement embodied learning, but it cannot replace it. When symbolic exchange displaces physical practice rather than supporting it, social reproduction weakens. Connection becomes shallow while competence erodes.

## **14 Embodied Cognition and Tacit Knowledge**

Philosophical and empirical research on embodied cognition emphasizes that much human knowledge is tacit: it cannot be fully articulated, transmitted symbolically, or compressed into explicit rules. Skills are learned through imitation, correction, and iterative engagement with physical systems.

Tacit knowledge is inherently historical. It accumulates through repeated practice and is preserved only insofar as it is exercised across generations. When training pipelines break, knowledge does not merely pause; it decays.

Social media platforms privilege symbolic exchange over embodied practice. Interaction is lightweight, rapidly substitutable, and detached from material consequence. While this supports expressive identity formation, it is poorly suited for transmitting skills that require discipline, patience, and physical engagement.

The danger lies not in virtuality per se, but in substitution. When virtual connection displaces rather than augments embodied learning, the conditions for competence reproduction erode.

## **15 Intergenerational Skill Transmission and Irreversibility**

History provides numerous examples of skill loss following disruption of transmission pipelines. Roman concrete, Damascus steel, and Greek fire were not lost because materials vanished, but because practices ceased to be reproduced. Once skilled communities dispersed, reconstruction proved difficult or impossible.

Modern societies are not immune to similar dynamics. Many contemporary systems depend on specialized skills maintained through apprenticeship, trade schools, and informal practice. When these institutions weaken, expertise narrows and fragility increases.

Evidence suggests declining enrollment in skilled trades, erosion of vocational training, and growing reliance on opaque technical systems maintained by shrinking cohorts of specialists. These trends are often discussed as labor market mismatches. They are more accurately understood as failures of social reproduction.

## **16 Distraction as Structural Displacement**

The risk posed by attention-extractive platforms is not merely that individuals are distracted. It is that distraction displaces the time and energy required to sustain training pipelines. Skill acquisition is slow, cumulative, and effortful. It cannot compete on equal terms with algorithmically optimized stimulation.



At population scale, even modest shifts in time allocation can have large effects. If millions of individuals divert hours per day away from learning, practice, and embodied social activity, the aggregate loss of competence compounds across generations.

These losses are unevenly distributed. Those with access to supportive institutions, mentors, and material security may remain insulated. Others become increasingly dependent on systems they cannot understand, repair, or replace.

## 17 Structural Fragility and Dependence

A society fluent in symbolic exchange but lacking material competence is structurally fragile. It becomes dependent on centralized systems and expert elites, reducing resilience and adaptive capacity. Failures propagate more widely because fewer individuals can intervene locally.

This fragility is not immediately visible. Systems continue to function so long as existing infrastructure holds. The danger emerges under stress: supply chain disruptions, environmental shocks, institutional breakdown.

At that point, lost skills cannot be rapidly reconstructed. Knowledge that took generations to accumulate cannot be recovered through information alone. It requires bodies, tools, and time.

The next section returns to the platform itself, examining how Facebook commodifies meaning, influence, and expertise, and how this process further destabilizes epistemic and social order.

## 18 Purchased Meaning and Simulated Expertise

Beyond advertising specific goods or services, Facebook's platform environment promotes a deeper and more corrosive implication: that meaning itself is purchasable. Visibility, influence, and perceived expertise are presented as commodities that can be acquired through promotion rather than earned through contribution or mastery.

In this environment, boredom, dissatisfaction, and existential malaise are framed as market opportunities. The feed repeatedly suggests that discomfort can be alleviated through acquisition, and that personal transformation can be achieved through consumption. Meaning is detached from practice and reattached to presentation.

This dynamic extends to expertise. Authority is inferred from reach rather than demonstrated competence. Influencers simulate knowledge through aesthetic cues, while algorithmic amplification substitutes for peer recognition or institutional validation. The distinction between appearance and substance collapses.

The epistemic consequence is profound. When influence is decoupled from skill, and visibility from legitimacy, users lose reliable signals for orienting themselves in the world. Trust becomes fragile, context-dependent, and easily manipulated. The platform does not merely host confusion; it manufactures it as a stable byproduct of monetization.

## 19 Spectacle, Simulation, and Commodity Reality

Critical theories of spectacle and simulation provide a useful diagnostic lens. In such accounts, representation increasingly substitutes for reality, and consumption replaces participation. However, the present analysis departs from purely cultural critique by emphasizing structural reproduction.

Facebook does not simply circulate images or symbols. It organizes material incentives such that simulation is cheaper than substance. Practicing a craft, acquiring expertise, or building community requires time, risk, and commitment. Purchasing visibility requires only money. Under such conditions, simulation outcompetes reality.

This is not a failure of taste or authenticity. It is an equilibrium outcome. When systems reward appearance over contribution, actors adapt accordingly. Over time, the distinction erodes not because it is denied, but because it is no longer economically viable.

## 20 Thermodynamic and Constraint-Based Interpretation

The preceding analyses admit a unified interpretation grounded in constraint dynamics and thermodynamic analogy. While social systems do not obey physical thermodynamics in a literal sense, they exhibit structural homologies that can be formalized.

Let attention be treated as a finite resource allocated over time. At any moment, an individual occupies an attentional state characterized by focus, continuity, and integration. Transitions between states incur cognitive cost.

High-entropy attentional environments are characterized by rapid state transitions, minimal memory, and low integration. Low-entropy environments constrain transitions, preserve continuity, and support cumulative structure. Short-form algorithmic feeds instantiate the former; learning, practice, and embodied skill acquisition instantiate the latter.

### 20.1 Entropy and Attentional Trajectories

Formally, consider an attentional state space  $\mathcal{A}$  with trajectories  $\gamma(t) \in \mathcal{A}$ . Entropy may be defined informally as a measure of dispersion over accessible states. High-entropy trajectories exhibit frequent transitions and weak dependence on past states. Low-entropy trajectories exhibit persistence and path dependence.

Algorithmic novelty injection increases entropy by maximizing unpredictability and minimizing commitment. Each item is designed to be consumed independently, discouraging the formation of long-lived attentional basins.

By contrast, learning and skill acquisition require repeated traversal of similar states, gradual refinement, and tolerance of error. These trajectories are energetically costly in high-entropy environments.

### 20.2 Extraction Fields and Stability

Facebook may be modeled as an extraction field operating over attentional space. The platform shapes the probability distribution of attentional transitions to maximize capture and turnover.

Value is extracted not by improving user outcomes, but by increasing interaction volume.

Crucially, this field is stable under dissatisfaction. Exit costs are high due to network effects, social embedding, and informational lock-in. Individual resistance yields only local relief. Aggregate dynamics persist.

This explains a central paradox: widespread resentment coexists with platform dominance. Stability arises not from consent, but from constraint.

### **20.3 Failure Compatibility and Irreversibility**

The system remains profitable even as user cognition degrades and advertiser outcomes worsen. This failure compatibility distinguishes extraction from exchange. Costs are externalized onto users and society, while revenue remains insulated.

Irreversibility enters through path dependence. As attentional baselines shift and skill transmission erodes, future capacity narrows. The system prunes possible futures by making certain trajectories—learning, mastery, embodied competence—less viable.

These effects accumulate gradually, masking their severity until thresholds are crossed.

## **21 Civilizational Risk and Structural Harm**

When examined at planetary scale, the dynamics described here raise concerns that exceed those associated with prior media technologies. Billions of individuals now spend significant portions of their cognitive lives within environments optimized for extraction rather than reproduction.

The harms are foreseeable, cumulative, and asymmetric. Decision-makers are insulated from consequence, while costs diffuse across populations and generations. Losses in competence, attention, and trust are not easily reversed once entrenched.

Whether such dynamics constitute a crime against humanity is a legal and political question. Structurally, however, the elements are present: mass participation, predictable harm, irreversibility, and profit-driven persistence.

The claim advanced here is not that Facebook alone determines civilizational outcomes. It is that platforms of this type introduce a new class of risk: systems that degrade future capacity while remaining locally stable and globally profitable.

The final section consolidates these findings and outlines directions for intervention and research.

## **22 Interpretation Through Constraint-First Frameworks**

The preceding analysis can be sharpened by interpreting Facebook’s dynamics through constraint-first theoretical frameworks that treat social systems as fields of admissible action rather than aggregations of individual choice. From this perspective, the platform’s harms arise not from persuasion or ideology, but from how it reorganizes constraints on attention, time, and viable futures.

Constraint-first analysis distinguishes between forces that compel behavior through coercion or belief and structures that compel behavior by aligning survival, participation, and ordinary action.

Facebook operates almost entirely through the latter. Users are not persuaded that the platform is good; they remain because exit carries social, informational, and relational costs.

The platform’s stability is therefore not ideological but structural. It persists because it renders alternatives costly and resistance locally ineffective.

## 23 RSVP Interpretation: Scalar, Vector, and Entropy Fields

Within the Relativistic Scalar–Vector–Plenum (RSVP) framework, social systems may be modeled as interacting scalar, vector, and entropy fields governing the distribution and flow of viable action.

In this interpretation, the scalar field represents attentional density, understood as the concentration of coherent cognitive resources available to an agent at a given moment. The vector field represents attentional flow, capturing the directional steering of attention induced by algorithmic curation, novelty gradients, and reward signals. The entropy field represents fragmentation and dispersion, describing the degree to which attention is divided, repeatedly reset, or prevented from forming persistent trajectories.

Facebook’s design actively shapes all three. Advertising saturation and short-form feeds increase entropy, preventing attentional density from accumulating. Algorithmic ranking and novelty injection impose strong vector flows, steering attention toward high-turnover content. Scalar capacity is continuously depleted and redistributed before coherence can emerge.

From this perspective, the platform does not merely host content; it engineers a field configuration that suppresses low-entropy trajectories such as learning, mastery, and embodied practice.

## 24 Entropic Reproduction and Path Dependence

RSVP and related constraint-based frameworks emphasize that systems reproduce themselves when ordinary, low-effort actions align with structural persistence. Facebook exemplifies this dynamic.

Scrolling, reacting, and passive consumption are low-entropy actions: they require minimal energy and fit naturally within the platform’s attentional field. Learning, organizing, and skill acquisition are high-entropy actions: they require sustained effort against prevailing gradients.

As a result, the platform reproduces itself entropically. Each low-effort interaction incrementally extends the system’s history while narrowing the space of viable future trajectories. This produces path dependence: once attentional baselines shift, returning to prior regimes becomes costly.

Crucially, this reproduction does not depend on satisfaction. It depends on alignment between low-energy behavior and system persistence. Dissatisfaction may coexist indefinitely with reproduction so long as exit remains costly.

## 25 Event-Historical Dynamics and Pruning of Futures

From an event-historical perspective, each interaction on the platform constitutes an irreversible event that updates the space of admissible futures. Individually trivial actions accumulate into collective path dependence.

As attentional norms shift toward fragmentation and novelty, futures that require continuity—extended education, apprenticeship, long-term collaboration—become less probable. The platform does not prohibit these futures; it prunes them by increasing their energetic and attentional cost.

This pruning operates below the level of conscious choice. Agents experience difficulty, exhaustion, or disinterest without encountering explicit prohibition. Structural harm thus appears as personal failure rather than systemic constraint.

Event-historical analysis clarifies why recovery is difficult. Once training pipelines decay and skills are lost, reconstructing them requires coordinated intervention and sustained deviation from default paths.

## **26 Extraction Fields and Structural Asymmetry**

Within the RSVP framework, Facebook may be understood as an extraction field nested inside a broader constraint field. Attention flows downhill along gradients engineered to maximize capture, while value flows upstream to platform owners.

This extraction is asymmetric. Users and advertisers absorb entropy and loss, while the platform accumulates surplus and structural power. Failure at the periphery does not destabilize the core. Instead, it reinforces the system by supplying continued input.

Such fields are difficult to disrupt through moral critique or individual exit. Effective intervention would require altering boundary conditions: reducing exit costs, flattening attention gradients, or introducing counter-structures capable of supporting low-entropy trajectories.

## **27 Structural Harm as Capacity Destruction**

Interpreted through constraint-first and RSVP lenses, Facebook’s primary harm is not deception or manipulation per se, but capacity destruction. The platform systematically degrades the conditions required for learning, coordination, and reproduction of competence.

This harm is structural rather than intentional. It arises from stable field configurations that favor short-term extraction over long-term coherence. Responsibility is therefore distributed across design choices, incentive structures, and regulatory environments rather than individual actors alone.

The significance of this interpretation is diagnostic. It explains why the platform remains dominant despite dissatisfaction, why reforms focused on content moderation fail, and why the most serious consequences emerge only at scale and over time.

## **28 From Critique to Counter-Structure**

If Facebook’s harms arise from stable extraction fields rather than isolated ethical failures, then meaningful intervention cannot consist solely of moderation, moral appeal, or individual exit. Structural harm requires structural counter-measures: alternative systems that reconfigure constraints, attention flows, and viable trajectories.

This section outlines two such counter-structures—*Spherepop OS* and *PlenumHub*—as constructive responses grounded in constraint-first and RSVP-compatible principles. These systems are not proposed as universal replacements for existing platforms, but as viable alternative regimes designed to preserve low-entropy cognition, embodied skill transmission, and durable social coordination.

## 29 Spherepop OS: Constraint-First Interface Design

Spherepop OS is a constraint-first computational environment designed to resist attention extraction by default. Rather than maximizing engagement, it enforces explicit structure on interaction, visibility, and progression.

At the interface level, Spherepop OS replaces infinite feeds with bounded scopes. Content exists within explicit contexts that must be entered deliberately and exited consciously. There is no algorithmic novelty injection. Temporal continuity is preserved through persistent workspaces rather than scroll-based replacement.

This design directly alters the attentional scalar field. By preventing rapid fragmentation, Spherepop OS allows attentional density to accumulate. Users remain within a coherent context long enough for learning, reflection, and production to occur.

Importantly, this is not a return to static media. Spherepop OS supports interaction, but interaction is constrained by structure rather than optimized for capture. Cognitive effort is front-loaded, not continuously taxed.

## 30 Low-Entropy Interaction and Skill Reproduction

Spherepop OS explicitly privileges low-entropy trajectories. Tasks are designed to persist across sessions. Progress is cumulative rather than ephemeral. Users encounter friction when attempting to abandon context prematurely, making continuity the path of least resistance.

This configuration supports skill acquisition. Learning modules, collaborative workspaces, and project timelines are integrated into the environment rather than buried beneath novelty. Failure is visible and instructive rather than hidden by algorithmic substitution.

From an RSVP perspective, the vector field within Spherepop OS is weak by design. Attention is not forcefully steered. Instead, users construct their own trajectories within bounded domains. Entropy is managed rather than maximized.

The system therefore functions as a cognitive scaffold: it does not teach skills directly, but it creates conditions under which skill reproduction is viable.

## 31 PlenumHub: Semantic Infrastructure Over Attention Markets

PlenumHub extends these principles to collective knowledge production and coordination. Rather than operating as an attention market, PlenumHub is designed as a semantic infrastructure: a shared environment for constructing, maintaining, and revising meaning over time.

Content in PlenumHub is organized by dependency, relevance, and conceptual lineage rather than engagement metrics. Visibility is earned through contribution coherence and semantic integration, not amplification.

This reconfigures the legitimacy problem identified earlier. Authority within PlenumHub arises from demonstrated understanding and sustained participation. Simulation is costly; substance is cheap.

By design, PlenumHub resists failure-compatible extraction. There is no advertising layer, no pay-to-appear mechanism, and no incentive to flood the system with low-quality material. The economic model, where present, is decoupled from attention volume.

## **32 Counter-Extraction and Structural Inversion**

Both Spherepop OS and PlenumHub function as counter-extraction fields. They invert the asymmetry characteristic of advertising-driven platforms by aligning system stability with the preservation and growth of user capacity rather than with user depletion. Within these systems, low-entropy behavior contributes directly to institutional reproduction, while high-entropy churn is structurally disfavored rather than incentivized. As a result, the accumulation of attention strengthens future cognitive and collaborative capacity instead of undermining it.

This inversion is crucial. A system that requires coherence to persist selects for learning, care, and contribution. Extraction-driven platforms select for novelty, simulation, and churn.

The goal is not moral improvement, but structural viability. Systems endure when their reproduction aligns with behaviors that preserve capacity.

## **33 Federated Alternatives and Exit Cost Reduction**

A central source of Facebook’s power is exit cost. Network effects, social embedding, and data lock-in make departure expensive even for dissatisfied users. Spherepop OS and PlenumHub are designed to be federated and interoperable, reducing these costs.

Federation allows communities to maintain autonomy while preserving connectivity. Interoperable identity and data portability prevent the monopolization of social presence. Exit becomes a gradient rather than a cliff.

From a constraint-first perspective, reducing exit cost is a primary lever for structural change. When alternatives are viable, extraction fields weaken without requiring universal adoption.

## **34 Structural Reform Without Moral Idealism**

These proposals do not assume virtuous users, enlightened corporations, or benevolent regulators. They assume ordinary behavior under constraint. Their design goal is not to persuade individuals to behave better, but to make better behavior easier.

Spherepop OS and PlenumHub do not eliminate desire, boredom, or aspiration. They constrain how these forces are monetized. They prevent hope from becoming an extractable resource and

attention from becoming an involuntary input.

As such, they should be understood not as utopian alternatives, but as structurally modest interventions grounded in realistic assumptions about human cognition and institutional inertia.

The concluding section synthesizes the analysis and outlines directions for further research and deployment.

## 35 Conclusion

This paper has argued that Facebook’s harms are not incidental, cultural, or primarily moral in nature. They are structural. The platform’s advertising-driven architecture constitutes a stable extraction regime that degrades attention, erodes legitimacy, and undermines the reproduction of knowledge and skill while remaining profitable and resilient to dissatisfaction.

Through historical comparison, psychological and economic analysis, cognitive science, and systems-level reasoning, the paper has shown that Facebook represents a qualitative break from prior media environments. Advertising without legitimacy, failure-compatible profit models, short-form algorithmic novelty, and virtualized social interaction jointly produce a high-entropy cognitive ecology incompatible with long-horizon learning, embodied practice, and durable social coordination.

The central contribution of this work is explanatory rather than accusatory. Moral outrage alone cannot account for the persistence of practices that are widely resented. A constraint-first and RSVP-compatible interpretation clarifies why such systems endure: they align low-effort behavior with structural reproduction, externalize cost, and prune future trajectories without explicit prohibition. Harm emerges as a cumulative, path-dependent process rather than a discrete event.

At civilizational scale, the stakes are significant. When billions of individuals spend large fractions of their cognitive lives within environments optimized for extraction rather than reproduction, losses in attention, competence, and trust accumulate across generations. These losses are not easily reversible. Skill transmission pipelines decay, epistemic signals degrade, and societies become increasingly dependent on systems they cannot repair or replace.

Importantly, this analysis does not imply technological determinism. Platforms do not dictate outcomes unilaterally. Rather, they shape constraint fields within which adaptation occurs. Different field configurations would yield different equilibria. The existence of viable counter-structures demonstrates that alternative trajectories are possible.

Spherepop OS and PlenumHub were introduced not as comprehensive solutions, but as constructive examples of how constraint-first design can invert extraction dynamics. By privileging bounded contexts, low-entropy interaction, semantic coherence, and federated interoperability, these systems align persistence with capacity rather than depletion. They reduce exit costs, weaken attention gradients, and make learning, coordination, and contribution energetically viable.

The broader implication is methodological. Effective intervention must operate at the level of structure rather than content. Moderation, transparency, and ethical appeals address symptoms, not reproduction dynamics. Structural reform requires altering incentive landscapes, attention flows, and boundary conditions such that harmful equilibria become unstable.



Future research should pursue empirical validation of the mechanisms proposed here. This includes measuring attentional entropy across platforms, quantifying hope extraction dynamics, studying longitudinal effects on skill acquisition, and testing the efficacy of constraint-first interface designs. Interdisciplinary collaboration will be essential, particularly in formalizing and evaluating thermodynamic analogies.

Facebook’s significance, then, lies not only in its scale, but in what it reveals about a new class of systems: infrastructures that profit by degrading future capacity while remaining locally stable. Understanding and responding to such systems is not merely a question of platform governance. It is a question of whether societies can preserve the conditions under which thinking, learning, building, and caring remain possible.

Politics, in this view, is not primarily a struggle over meaning or expression. It is a struggle over which futures are allowed to exist.

## Appendices

### A Formal Constraint and Entropic Framework

This appendix formalizes the structural arguments advanced in the main text using a constraint-first, event-historical, and RSVP-compatible framework. Its purpose is not to derive new physics, but to render the mechanisms analytically precise and falsifiable.

#### A.1 State Space and Attentional Configuration

Let  $S$  denote the space of agent states. Each state

$$s \in S$$

encodes an agent’s attentional configuration, including focus, continuity, fragmentation, and available cognitive capacity.

Let  $A$  denote the space of attentional actions, where an action

$$a \in A$$

corresponds to an allocation of attention over a finite time interval.

Define a transition operator

$$T : S \times A \rightarrow S$$

such that  $T(s, a) = s'$  is the successor attentional state induced by action  $a$  in state  $s$ .

#### A.2 RSVP Field Decomposition

Within the RSVP framework, the attentional environment is decomposed into three interacting fields. The scalar field  $\Phi(s)$  encodes attentional density, defined as the amount of coherent cognitive capacity available at state  $s$ . The vector field  $\vec{v}(s)$  encodes attentional flow, specifying the

directional influence exerted by algorithmic ranking, novelty gradients, and interface design. The entropy field  $\mathcal{S}(s)$  encodes attentional fragmentation, measuring the degree to which attention is dispersed, reset, or prevented from forming persistent trajectories.

High values of  $\mathcal{S}(s)$  correspond to frequent attentional state transitions with weak path dependence.

### A.3 Entropy of Attentional Trajectories

Let  $\gamma : [0, T] \rightarrow S$  be an attentional trajectory over time.

Define the incremental attentional entropy

$$\Delta\mathcal{S}_t = \mathcal{S}(s_{t+1}) - \mathcal{S}(s_t).$$

[High-Entropy Trajectory] A trajectory  $\gamma$  is high-entropy if

$$\mathbb{E}[\Delta\mathcal{S}_t] \gg 0$$

over its duration.

[Low-Entropy Trajectory] A trajectory  $\gamma$  is low-entropy if

$$\mathbb{E}[\Delta\mathcal{S}_t] \approx 0$$

and exhibits strong path dependence.

Short-form algorithmic feeds induce high-entropy trajectories. Learning, skill acquisition, and embodied practice require low-entropy trajectories.

### A.4 Viability and Cognitive Survival

Let  $\Phi_{\max}$  denote the minimum attentional density required to sustain coherent learning or skill reproduction.

Define a cognitive survival operator

$$\text{Surv}_c(s, a) = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } \Phi(T(s, a)) \geq \Phi_{\max}, \\ 0 & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

A trajectory is cognitively viable iff

$$\forall t, \text{Surv}_c(s_t, a_t) = 1.$$

High-entropy environments reduce the measure of actions  $a$  satisfying this condition.

### A.5 Extraction Fields

Define an extraction field

$$\Psi : S \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$$

whose gradient induces involuntary attentional diversion.

Let  $\vec{g}_\Psi(s) = \nabla \Psi(s)$  denote the extraction gradient.

Define attentional allocation  $a(s)$  as a vector over attentional channels. The instantaneous extraction rate is

$$X(s) = \vec{g}_\Psi(s) \cdot a(s).$$

[Involuntary Attention Capture] Capture occurs at state  $s$  if

$$X(s) > 0 \quad \forall a \in A_{\text{adm}}(s).$$

Advertising-saturated and novelty-driven platforms satisfy this condition.

## A.6 Failure-Compatible Profit Regime

Let advertisers be indexed by  $i$ , each with return

$$R_i = V_i^{\text{out}} - V_i^{\text{in}}.$$

Platform profit is

$$\Pi = \sum_i V_i^{\text{in}} - C_{\text{infra}},$$

where  $C_{\text{infra}}$  is sublinear in advertiser count.

[Failure Compatibility] If

$$\frac{\partial \Pi}{\partial R_i} \approx 0 \quad \text{for most } i,$$

then platform profitability does not depend on advertiser success.

This condition characterizes Facebook’s advertising model.

## A.7 Event-Historical Dynamics

Let  $H = \{h_0, h_1, \dots\}$  denote the space of attentional histories, where

$$h_{t+1} = h_t \cup \{(s_t, a_t)\}.$$

Define the admissible future operator

$$\text{Fut}(h_t) = \{h' \mid h_t \preceq h' \text{ and } \text{Surv}_c \text{ holds}\}.$$

[Structural Pruning] Structural harm acts by monotonically reducing

$$|\text{Fut}(h_t)|$$

over time.

High-entropy extraction fields accelerate pruning by increasing the cost of low-entropy trajectories.

## A.8 Capacity Destruction

Let  $\mathcal{K}(t)$  denote population-level stock of embodied skills and tacit knowledge.

Define reproduction dynamics

$$\mathcal{K}(t+1) = \mathcal{K}(t) + \Delta\mathcal{K}(t),$$

where  $\Delta\mathcal{K}(t) < 0$  when training pipelines fall below replacement thresholds.

[Irreversibility] If  $\mathcal{K}(t)$  falls below a critical threshold  $\kappa$ , then

$$\lim_{t \rightarrow \infty} \mathcal{K}(t) = 0$$

without external counter-structures.

## A.9 Counter-Structures

A counter-structure  $C$  modifies attentional and constraint fields such that

$$\Phi_C(s) = \Phi(s) + \Delta_C(s), \quad \Delta_C(s) \geq 0.$$

Spherepop OS and PlenumHub instantiate counter-structures by suppressing extraction gradients, enforcing bounded contexts of interaction, privileging low-entropy cognitive and collaborative trajectories, and reducing exit costs that otherwise lock users into extractive platforms.

[Structural Intervention] A system alters outcomes iff it increases

$$|\text{Fut}(h_t)|$$

for a non-negligible measure of histories.

# B Empirical Measurement and Research Agenda

This appendix outlines empirical strategies for testing the structural claims advanced in the main text and formalized in Appendix A. The goal is not to assert definitive measurements, but to specify operational definitions, observable proxies, and falsifiable hypotheses.

The research agenda is explicitly interdisciplinary, spanning media studies, cognitive science, economics, sociology, and systems analysis.

## B.1 Measuring Attentional Entropy

Attentional entropy may be operationalized as the rate and unpredictability of attentional state transitions during platform use. Empirical proxies for this construct include average dwell time per content item, the variance of dwell time within a session, the frequency of context switching across content categories, and the rate at which attentional focus is reset following interruptions.

[Empirical Attentional Entropy] Let  $n$  be the number of attentional transitions in a session of duration  $T$ . Define

$$\hat{\mathcal{S}} = \frac{1}{T} \sum_{i=1}^n H(a_i),$$

where  $H(a_i)$  estimates the informational novelty of transition  $a_i$ .

Short-form algorithmic feeds exhibit significantly higher  $\hat{\mathcal{S}}$  than long-form, bounded-context environments.

Longitudinal designs could assess whether sustained exposure increases baseline entropy across non-platform activities.

## B.2 Hope Extraction Metrics

Hope extraction refers to the monetization of aspiration under conditions in which the probability of realization is structurally low. Empirical indicators of this mechanism include advertiser churn rates analyzed in relation to overall platform revenue growth, the distribution of return on advertising spend across advertiser size and income classes, the persistence of advertising categories characterized by low fulfillment or conversion rates, and correlations between indicators of financial precarity and levels of advertising engagement.

Platform revenue remains stable or increases despite declining median advertiser outcomes.

Survey-based methods may supplement transactional data by measuring advertiser expectations before and after campaigns.

## B.3 Legitimacy and Signal-to-Noise Degradation

Epistemic degradation may be assessed through changes in signal-to-noise ratios within information environments. Relevant approaches include expert evaluations of content credibility in relation to its visibility, comparative analyses of engagement metrics against independent assessments of content quality, and user trust surveys examined in correlation with levels of exposure intensity.

Visibility on advertising-driven platforms is weakly correlated with epistemic legitimacy.

Network analysis may reveal how algorithmic amplification distorts trust signals over time.

## B.4 Cognitive and Educational Outcomes

The effects of high-entropy media environments on learning and skill acquisition may be evaluated through longitudinal studies examining sustained attention capacity, controlled experiments comparing learning outcomes across differing media conditions, correlational analyses linking platform use intensity to academic performance, and time-use studies that track the displacement of practice-based or skill-building activities.

High exposure to fragmented media environments predicts reduced performance on tasks requiring sustained attention and delayed reward.

Care must be taken to distinguish correlation from causation; natural experiments and matched cohort designs are particularly valuable.

## **B.5 Skill Transmission and Reproduction**

Population-level skill reproduction may be assessed through enrollment and completion rates in vocational and apprenticeship programs, demographic trends within skilled trades and technical fields, measures of intergenerational skill retention within families or communities, and indicators of system resilience observed during periods of infrastructure stress.

Declines in embodied skill transmission correlate with increased reliance on mediated symbolic interaction.

Historical comparison can contextualize contemporary trends within longer cycles of skill loss and recovery.

## **B.6 Exit Costs and Network Lock-In**

Exit cost may be operationalized as the effort required to sustain social, informational, and economic participation outside a dominant platform. Relevant measures include the number of distinct services required to replicate prior functionality, the degree of social connectivity lost following exit, the presence of data portability barriers, and the time and coordination costs associated with migration.

High exit costs predict continued platform use despite reported dissatisfaction.

Comparative analysis of federated systems may test whether reduced exit costs alter behavior.

## **B.7 Evaluating Counter-Structures**

Spherepop OS and PlenumHub provide test cases for constraint-first design. Their evaluation may be grounded in observed reductions in attentional entropy, increased persistence of task-relevant contexts, improvements in learning and collaborative outcomes, and lower churn accompanied by higher levels of long-horizon engagement.

Constraint-first environments increase the viability of low-entropy trajectories without requiring behavioral idealism.

Pilot studies, small-scale deployments, and longitudinal observation are appropriate initial methods.

## **B.8 Scope and Limitations**

This research agenda acknowledges significant constraints, including limited access to platform data, ethical considerations in experimentation, and confounding cultural variables. Claims should therefore be framed probabilistically and tested incrementally.

The purpose of this appendix is not to prescribe a single methodology, but to demonstrate that the structural claims advanced in this paper admit empirical scrutiny. A theory that cannot, even in principle, be tested would not justify the conclusions drawn here.

## **C Personal Reflections on Platform Degradation**

This appendix records personal observations derived from long-term, continuous use of Facebook over more than a decade. These reflections are not presented as representative samples or statistical evidence, but as situated, longitudinal experience that motivated and informed the structural analysis developed in the main text.

Such reflections are included not to substitute for empirical study, but to document how structural mechanisms manifest phenomenologically for a persistent user attempting to use the platform in good faith.

### **C.1 Duration and Mode of Use**

My engagement with Facebook spans the period prior to algorithmic feed dominance through the present advertising-saturated environment. During earlier phases of use, the platform supported long-form posting, extended discussion, event coordination, and durable social interaction. Posts were primarily authored by known contacts, and visibility correlated loosely with social relevance.

In recent years, my use has shifted toward defensive engagement: hiding posts, blocking pages, and attempting to preserve minimal coherence within the feed. This change reflects not a loss of interest in social interaction, but the increasing difficulty of using the platform without continuous mitigation.

### **C.2 Advertising Saturation and Blocking Behavior**

I have blocked thousands of pages over time in an attempt to reduce advertising intrusion. While this produces temporary local relief, it does not reduce the overall rate of advertising. Instead, blocking appears to trigger substitution: new pages with similar content rapidly replace those removed.

This dynamic creates the impression of an inexhaustible supply of low-quality advertisers. The effort required to block them becomes an ongoing form of unpaid labor that does not alter global platform behavior.

Notably, blocking does not diminish the thematic repetition of advertisements. Instead, it seems to widen exposure by introducing additional sources offering near-identical content.

### **C.3 Repetition, Identity Cloning, and Synthetic Pages**

A striking feature of contemporary Facebook advertising is the proliferation of pages that are slightly distinct but clearly derived from a common source. These pages often reuse the same images, introductory text, and narrative framing, while differing only in page name or claimed identity.

Common examples include pages offering stock market or investment advice, generic motivational or greeting pages that present themselves primarily through phatic gestures such as wishing users a pleasant day, and lifestyle branding pages that circulate vague narratives of personal or financial transformation without substantive content.

The reuse of identical photographs and text across multiple nominally distinct pages strongly suggests centralized generation. In many cases, the only variation is the page name or the purported individual behind it, which is frequently fictitious.

From a technical perspective, such duplication should be straightforward to detect. Shared payment instruments, network identifiers, or asset reuse would allow clustering with minimal effort. The persistence of these patterns therefore appears to reflect incentive misalignment rather than technical limitation.

#### **C.4 Structural Incentives for Low-Quality Proliferation**

The platform’s structure appears to actively encourage the proliferation of low-quality, near-identical advertising pages. Because visibility is purchased and failure is absorbed at the periphery, there is little downside to generating large numbers of minimally differentiated pages.

Advertisers are incentivized to test minor variations at scale, to discard pages rapidly when performance declines, and to obscure responsibility by fragmenting identity across multiple nominally distinct fronts.

This strategy would be untenable in advertising regimes that rely on durable reputation or localized trust. On Facebook, it is rational.

The resulting environment is one in which legitimacy signals collapse. Users encounter an endless stream of pages that appear social but lack accountable identity, making trust calibration difficult or impossible.

#### **C.5 Comparative Intensity and Subjective Load**

In terms of raw advertising intensity, Facebook occupies a middle position relative to other media environments I have encountered. Advertising frequency is lower than on platforms such as YouTube, where interruptions may occur every few minutes, but higher than early broadcast media.

For a fast reader, advertisements on Facebook can appear effectively every second, interleaved with content at a rate that prevents stable engagement. While this is less intrusive than the aggressive pop-ups characteristic of sites such as The Pirate Bay, it is more psychologically pervasive due to its integration into a social feed.

The cumulative effect is not shock or irritation, but erosion. Attention is continuously diverted, context is repeatedly reset, and sustained interaction becomes difficult without active resistance.

#### **C.6 Interpretive Significance**

These reflections are consistent with the structural analysis presented in the main text. They illustrate how failure-compatible advertising, high-entropy attention environments, and legitimacy-free visibility manifest in everyday use.

Importantly, the experience described here does not require assuming malicious intent. It arises naturally from incentive structures that reward scale, substitution, and extraction over quality, coherence, or accountability.



The persistence of use despite dissatisfaction is itself evidence of structural constraint. Continued engagement reflects exit cost rather than endorsement.

This appendix is therefore not a complaint, but a phenomenological record of what it is like to inhabit an extraction field over time.

## **D On the Refusal of Images: Simulation, Language, and Ethical Non-Reproduction**

This appendix explains the deliberate absence of figures, screenshots, diagrams, or illustrative images in this paper. The omission is methodological, philosophical, and ethical rather than accidental.

The systems analyzed here operate precisely by circulating images whose apparent banality masks their structural function. Reproducing such images, even for critical purposes, risks extending the very dynamics under critique.

### **D.1 Simulation Without Reference**

From a Baudrillardian perspective, contemporary platform imagery does not represent reality so much as replace it. The images that dominate advertising-driven feeds are simulations without referents: signs that no longer point to a stable object, person, or practice.

The most characteristic examples are not overtly shocking. They are deliberately neutral: a smiling person at a desk, a cup of coffee, a softly lit interior, a greeting that says only “Hi there.” Their power lies in their interchangeability. Any one image can substitute for any other without loss of function.

This interchangeability is not incidental. It signals that the image does not communicate content, but serves as a carrier for attention capture and legitimacy simulation. Meaning is evacuated so that circulation can be maximized.

In such a regime, reproducing images does not clarify analysis. It merely extends circulation.

### **D.2 Language Games and the Limits of Showing**

From a Wittgensteinian perspective, meaning is not contained in symbols but arises from use within a form of life. The images encountered on Facebook do not belong to a language game of communication, instruction, or shared practice. They belong to a language game of interruption.

Their grammar is minimal. A smiling face, a generic name, a vague greeting. These elements do not assert propositions that can be evaluated as true or false. They function as phatic gestures, maintaining contact without content.

Because these images do not assert, they cannot be refuted. Because they do not mean, they cannot be debated. Their role is to occupy attention and simulate social presence long enough to permit extraction.

Including such images as figures would therefore misrepresent their function. They are not evidence in the traditional sense; they are instruments.

### D.3 Why the Ordinary Is Horrifying

The most disturbing aspect of these images is precisely their ordinariness. A woman sitting at a desk holding a coffee, wearing a sweater, smiling slightly. Nothing is visibly wrong. And yet the image participates in a system that is structurally violent.

The horror does not reside in the image itself, but in its role as a disposable mask. The same photograph is reused across multiple pages bearing different names—such as *Market Trends*, *Isabellau Przywara Abby*, *Graceu Pedro Roset*, or *Stock Market Insights*—with minimal variation.

The accompanying text may consist of nothing more than: “Hi there. Just stopping by to say hello.”

Once recognized, this pattern cannot be unseen. The image ceases to appear human and begins to appear industrial. Identity becomes a texture applied to attention rather than a person embedded in a social world.

To reproduce such images is to reinscribe their effect.

### D.4 Deepfakes, Degradation, and Algorithmic Accommodation

At earlier stages of platform use, I encountered large volumes of explicitly degrading synthetic imagery, including extremely sexist deepfakes. Through persistent blocking and reporting, this content eventually ceased appearing in my feed.

This outcome demonstrates that algorithmic accommodation is possible when a user’s resistance becomes costly to ignore. It does not demonstrate that the content was removed from the platform, nor that the underlying incentives changed.

The system learned to avoid me. It did not learn to stop.

This distinction matters. Harm reduction through personalization conceals the persistence of structural violence. The absence of exposure is mistaken for the absence of harm.

### D.5 Ethical Non-Reproduction

The refusal to include images in this paper is therefore an ethical decision grounded in the analysis itself. Reproducing platform imagery would extend the circulation of simulation, re-expose readers to content explicitly designed to bypass reflective judgment, and contribute to the normalization of structures that depend on repetition and banality for their effectiveness.

Instead, this paper relies on description, naming, and structural analysis. Where images would normally appear, language is used to delineate patterns rather than reproduce instances.

This choice aligns with the paper’s broader methodological commitment: to analyze systems without becoming instruments of their reproduction.

What cannot be shown without harm must be said carefully—or not at all.

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