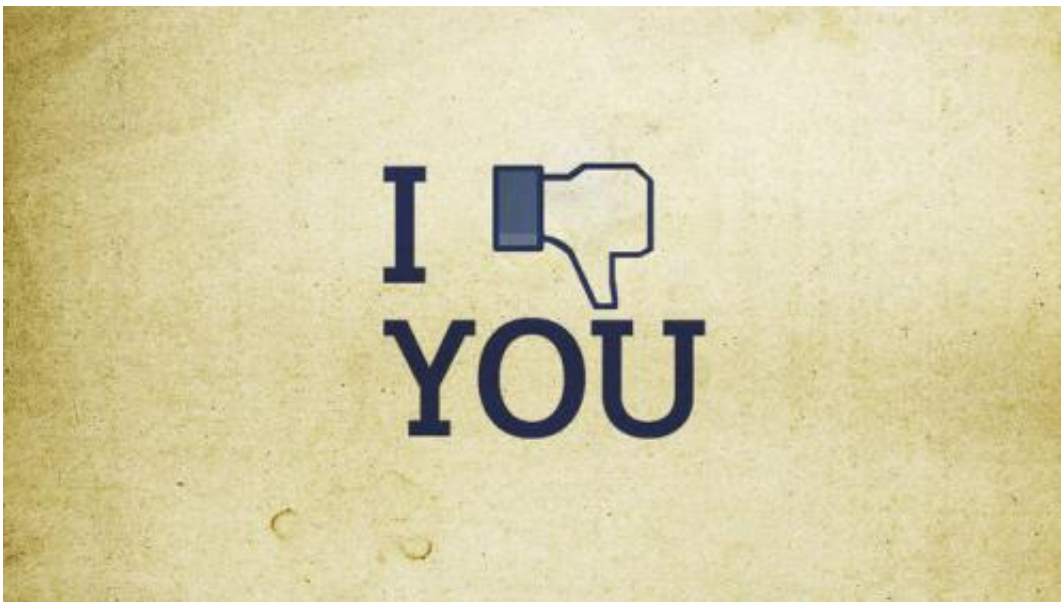# If you don't like Facebook, you can leave – it's easier than you think

December 27 2013, by Robbie Fordyce

Credit: Ondřej Vokoun

Breaking up is hard to do, especially with social media. But thousands of people are doing just that, and with the new year and its inevitable resolutions just around the corner, it might be a good time to examine the ethics of using software and platforms.

We use Facebook as an example for this article, but the same questions are relevant for many different types of social media.

Is Facebook ethical? It's an important question, and the answer isn't quite "yes" or "no". First, we need to make a short detour through a few thoughts about what ethics actually are.

A particular "ethics" is a set of rules or provisions that an individual or group considers ideal for solving problems with the best intentions. What's good in one situation isn't necessarily applicable in others, and ethics describes what we do when we choose between alternatives.

The general "vibe" of complaints about Facebook's ethics (or practically any other social media platform) from users and commentators is that it aggregates power from our daily interactions, then sells the data we produce.

Within the field of media studies there's some equivocation about whether Facebook operates something like a factory where users churn out vast amounts of work for no pay, or whether it's an insidious machine that makes use of all our data in giant statistical sets.

Other popular responses fear the persistent invasion of our privacy, or else note how reduced our metaphors have become. We can't love anymore, we can only like.

Critics like Eli Parisier argue that through the fairly limited means of interaction – likes, pokes, comments – it corrupts some aspect of our social being as a species and as individuals. Some vibrant aspect of being human is lost, replaced by a placid and emotionally grey terrain of "LOLs" and smileys that lacks genuine interaction.

Social empowerment

There have always been complaints when new cultural technologies arrive on the scene: heavy metal and rock and roll, role-playing game

Dungeons & Dragons and even writing.

That said, there is something different about the way in which Facebook has power over our social interactions and how these interactions make money for them. If this is a concern for people, then there are alternatives.

The most common response to ethical concerns about Facebook is "why don't you just leave?" This question is an important one, with a few answers.

First: your "leaving" doesn't actually remove any of the data from Facebook's servers – by agreeing to the terms of use, you've already given Facebook all of your photos and data, and they're certainly going to hang on to it if they can. Long after you remove yourself from the network, your shadow will linger on Facebook's servers.

In fact, the relationship is one you rarely have control over in the first place - the infamous shadow profiles track you through social media widgets, which build a profile without needing you to be logged in (if you want to stop that, consider using blocking programs like Ghostery or AdBlock).

Second: for many people, Facebook represents a convenient way of keeping in touch with their friends and family. Leaving Facebook can mean missing out on news, photos and invitations. Moving to alternatives, like [Diaspora](#), can feel like the Wild West without as many friendly faces around.

Diaspora attempts to provide social networking without the problems of Facebook. What it does differently, to protect your privacy, is to allow you to choose where your data is hosted.

This means that you can act as your own data host, if you're technically proficient. If not, a friend, or a trusted server can do the job for you.

Diaspora is not the total solution, but it does act to undermine the monopolies over social media held by sites like Facebook and Twitter.

Diaspora is an Open Source platform, so if you have issues with the program you can modify it yourself.

Previously, the project has been plagued with a wide range of problems, including funding issues, the death of the lead programmer, and internal conflicts. But in the past year the project has picked up new life, is gathering users and, despite its rocky past, Diaspora now works.

The solutions to our ethical problems with social media don't all have to be technical. Legislation in California is allowing for kids to request that their [data be deleted](link) from social media sites before they reach the age of maturity. In turn, because Facebook is incorporated in Ireland for tax purposes, laws in the European Union allow non-US citizens to [uncover all the data](link) that Facebook holds on them.

If you have ethical concerns about Facebook, your response is not limited to leaving. Knowing more about what data exists about you, how it's used, and what your alternatives are can allow us to be more ethical without pulling the plug entirely.

Robbie and Luke can be found on Diaspora. They have two friends each, including each other.

This story is published courtesy of [The Conversation](link) *(under Creative Commons-Attribution/No derivatives).*

Source: The Conversation