

Facebook to deliver more local news to US users

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Facebook has faced criticism that it failed to prevent the spread of false news, especially ahead of the 2016 US presidential election

Facebook said Monday it has decided to deliver more local news to US users, in its latest effort to manage the flow of information on the

enormously-influential social network.

Earlier this month, Facebook announced it will ask its two billion users to rank their trust in [news](#) sources as part of an effort to combat the spread of misinformation.

The changes come as the online giant seeks to address charges that it has failed—along with Google and Twitter—to prevent the spread of [false news](#), especially ahead of the 2016 US presidential election.

"Local news helps build community—both on and offline," Facebook co-founder and chief executive Mark Zuckerberg said in a post on the social network.

"It's an important part of making sure the time we all spend on Facebook is valuable."

Zuckerberg traveled around the US last year, visiting with Facebook users.

"One theme people kept telling me is how much we all have in common if we can get past some of the most divisive national issues," Zuckerberg said in the post.

"Many people told me they thought that if we could turn down the temperature on the more divisive issues and instead focus on concrete local issues, then we'd all make more progress together."

He also cited research suggesting that reading [local news](#) prompted people to be more engaged in their communities.

Facebook is showing US members more stories from news sources in their cities or towns, and plans to begin doing the same in more countries

later this year.

'Lowering the bar'

Recent changes at Facebook include a new "trusted sources" ranking intended to "make sure the news you see is high quality" and to foster "a sense of common ground" rather than sow division, Zuckerberg said in a previous post.

Facebook decided to rely on member surveys to rank trust in [news sources](#).

A freshly-introduced update highlights what friends and family share on the network, over advertisements, celebrity and media posts.

The company cast the changes as part of a refocus on "community"—prioritizing social interactions and relationships, even if it means people spend less time on the platform.

Known for annual personal goals ranging from killing his own food to learning Chinese, Zuckerberg's stated mission for this year is to "fix" the social network.

He plans to target abuse and hate, as well as interference by nation states.

Facebook is a powerful platform for distributing news stories, and the changes have raised concerns among media organizations that had adapted to the social network's existing formula for displaying content to users.

The announcement by Zuckerberg also drew criticism that Facebook could be "lowering the bar" for what constitutes news.

Assistant professor Jennifer Grygiel of the S.I. Newhouse School of public communications at Syracuse University in New York said that serving up statements from public agencies as news on Facebook could give government more power when it comes to what the public knows.

"What you are going to see is a rise in state-run media if this applies to every official page in your neighborhood," Grygiel told AFP.

"We are potentially getting more misinformation because we have lost the gatekeepers and fact-checkers in journalism. Journalists have a role in our society, and I don't think Mark Zuckerberg has figured out what that is yet."

The professor noted that an early sampling of what is being presented as local "news" featured posts from state or city entities in an offering more akin to a bulletin board than the work of journalists.

"I think (Facebook) has watered down the idea of news," Grygiel said.

"They should stop using the word 'news' unless they are actually talking about journalistic institutions. They are redefining what is news, and they are lowering the bar."

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