

The World Wide Web at 29: Tim Berners-Lee talks weaponization and big tech

March 13 2018, by Levi Sumagaysay, The Mercury News



Credit: Wikipedia

It's turning 29—what do you get the World Wide Web that has everything?

Tim Berners-Lee, the creator/inventor of the web as we know it, has some fatherly advice for the web, starting with: more users, more equality and perhaps more regulation for tech giants.

In an open letter Monday on the 29th anniversary of his submission for his proposal for the web, Berners-Lee says: "This year marks a milestone in the web's history: for the first time, we will cross the tipping point when more than half of the world's population will be online."

He believes everyone should be online.

"To be offline today is to be excluded from opportunities to learn and earn, to access valuable services, and to participate in democratic debate," he said, and called for "serious" investing to close the gap. He also urged supporting policies that help women and the poor to have access to the web, plus the skills to compete in today's digital world.

Also, add Berners-Lee to the growing chorus of voices saying the web is under threat from tech giants.

"The fact that power is concentrated among so few companies has made it possible to weaponize the web at scale," he writes. "In recent years, we've seen conspiracy theories trend on [social media platforms](#), fake Twitter and Facebook accounts stoke [social tensions](#), external actors interfere in elections, and criminals steal troves of personal data."

He predicted that because of the dominance of a few tech companies, "we can expect the next 20 years to be far less innovative than the last."

He suggested that a legal or regulatory framework that "accounts for

social objectives" could help in an industry that's designed to maximize profit instead of the "social good."

And while he's at it, Berners-Lee urges people to think bigger for the web's future.

He says thinking that advertising is the only way to make money online is a myth, and so is the mentality that it's too late to do anything to make real changes.

In last year's letter, he lamented the erosion of privacy, the rise of misinformation and the lack of transparency in political advertising online. Even though he has been talking about the problems with the web for many years, now he seems to be saying things are at their worst as he referred to the "setbacks of the last two years."

"I want the web to reflect our hopes and fulfill our dreams, rather than magnify our fears and deepen our divisions," Berners-Lee writes as the web gets closer to being a full three decades old.

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Citation: The World Wide Web at 29: Tim Berners-Lee talks weaponization and big tech (2018, March 13) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-03-world-wide-web-tim-berners-lee.html>

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