

Why we should all cut the Facebook cord—or should we?

April 4 2018, by Mike Sosteric



A new AI tool created to help identify certain kinds of substance abuse based on a homeless youth's Facebook posts could provide homeless shelters with vital information to incorporate into each individual's case management plan. Credit: CC0 Public Domain

I wrote my dissertation on the political economy of scholarly

communication, and the transformative potentials of what were then emerging internet technologies.

Ever since, I've been teaching critical courses on our always human, and sometimes religious, obsession with technology. For a long time I've been warning about the dangers of social media and why all of us should be very concerned.

Now, after [stunning revelations](#) by Christopher Wylie on how Cambridge Analytica used Facebook data to help sway elections worldwide, people are having a harder time trusting Mark Zuckerberg's Orwellian machine.

Or so you would think.

[A recent Reuters poll](#) suggests that while only 41 per cent of Americans trust the platform, an overwhelming majority had not taken any steps to protect themselves from data invasion.

Given that [even phone records were scraped](#) and that Facebook appears to represent a threat to democracy, these numbers seem much too low. The question for us today is: Why? Why aren't more people breaking away from the machine?

Part of the problem is that we are simply addicted to Facebook. Like [cocaine addicts](#), alcoholics or smokers, [we have a hard time giving it up](#).

Not surprisingly, that's by design.

As [Sean Parker, founding president of Facebook, admits](#), the narcotic-like, [slot-machine](#) effects were consciously designed into the platform right from the start. As Parker bravely confesses, they "understood this consciously," but they "did it anyway."

Trusting by nature

Part of the problem is that people are trusting by nature. We don't want to think badly of others, especially nice white boys like Mark Zuckerberg, [who say they want to change the world](#) for the better. Besides, Zuckerberg [says he's sorry](#) and he [apologizes profusely](#). So really, why the alarm?

But is the addiction totally harmless, and is our forgiveness really warranted?

We really have to wonder how anyone can feel forgiveness in light of these developments:

Google software engineer [Matt McKeon's](#) fancy chart that shows that despite privacy scandals, Facebook has steadily and relentlessly increased its users' data exposure.

We've learned that Zuckerberg once called the first Facebook users ["dumb fucks"](#) for handing over their private data.

We've read about the [unethical experiment conducted by Cornell University researchers](#) designed for Facebook to show them how to [manipulate users with their feeds](#).

We've heard that former Facebook vice-president Chamath Palihapitiya told students flat out they were being programmed by Facebook and asked them point-blank how much ["intellectual independence"](#) they were willing to give up.

We've learned that another Facebook VP, Andrew Bosworth, said recently this was ["unequivocally not a data breach"](#) despite all evidence to the contrary. And that Facebook [executives ignored](#) a litany of [warnings](#)

[about data breaches.](#)

Facial recognition

I'll be honest, I get a little worried when I hear that in 2017, Facebook began linking oceans of personal data [to people's actual, physical faces.](#) Now, even if you leave your phone at home, Facebook's [ridiculously powerful facial recognition](#) technologies [help ensure](#) total Orwellian observation and, according to the accounts of Facebook executives, complete Pavlovian control of its users.

An exaggeration? Or not necessarily a bad thing?

Look what happened in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, when Cambridge Analytica managed to help get a reality-challenged reality star elected the most powerful man on Earth. Or how about [heads of state pushing corporate agendas](#), oligarchs [undermining global democracy](#) and sowing global discord, [white supremacists seeding culture with racist ideas and far-right archetypes.](#)

MK-ULTRA was the [CIA's "mind control"](#) project, and Facebook is now an MK-ULTRA dream come true. As a weapon of mass thought control across myriad cultures, it is arguably more powerful than even the Bible. What's most scary, it's being manipulated by some "alpha dogs," whose only real concern seems to be clawing their way to the top of an increasingly massive garbage pile.

Maybe it's an overstatement.

Maybe it's not all that bad.

'Big Brother'

As for me, I don't trust Big Brother's fancy new machine at all. [Sure, the machine's operators are shutting and locking all the doors now](#), but the beast already has your data, your face and an [algorithm that keeps all its users basically branded like cattle](#).

With perhaps billions addicted across multiple platforms all around the world, and with Cambridge Analytica racing around the planet trying to do what it did in the United States, maybe saving democracy is the least of our worries, and maybe fear is the most appropriate emotion.

Still, I admit, I do have faith in the human race. I have faith that once we all wake up and see the truth, we can easily get the beast under control, and I certainly think we should.

Facebook is the most powerful social technology on Earth. If you leave it vulnerable to manipulation by the aforementioned alpha dogs, they're probably going to do bad things with it.

But we could also do great things with it as well. Just look how easy it was used to influence elections. Just imagine how fast we could educate and change the world. Maybe we can create a better place due to all we're learning now.

Maybe we'll all be dead following a nuclear holocaust by 2030. Or maybe, just maybe, we'll have a world we'll be proud to call our own.

As for me, until our global vision clears and somebody healthier and more trustworthy is in control, neither me [nor my children](#) are getting anywhere near the beast.

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