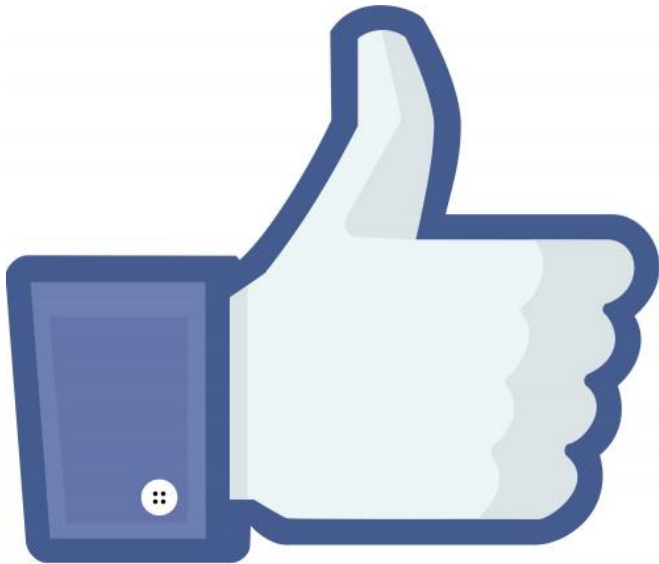


Facebook admits social media can be bad if you use it in this way

26 December 2017, by Queenie Wong, The Mercury News



Facebook's mission is to "bring the world closer together," but the tech firm this year has faced mounting criticism that social media could be ripping society apart.

Last week, the social media giant acknowledged that spending time on its website can be bad for you—if you're merely consuming information, but not interacting with your family and friends.

"Just like in person, interacting with people you care about can be beneficial, while simply watching others from the sidelines may make you feel worse," wrote David Ginsberg, Facebook's director of research, and Moira Burke, a research scientist at the tech firm, in a blog post.

The tech firm pointed to a study in which University of Michigan students were randomly assigned to read Facebook for 10 minutes. Students who just consumed the information were in a worse mood

than those who posted or chatted with their friends.

Other research also shows that users who interact with people by sharing messages, posts or comments improved their well-being, the company said.

From ads linked to Russia to fake news, Facebook and other tech firms have been grappling with how they might be harming democracy.

Sean Parker, Facebook's founding president, told Axios in November that the social media site was "exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology." Every time users posted their thoughts on the social network, he or she felt rewarded when one of their friends commented or liked a post.

Also last month, another former Facebook executive, Chamath Palihapitiya, told Stanford Graduate School of Business students that the tech firm created tools that are "ripping apart the social fabric of how society works."

Those remarks made headlines in December, prompting Facebook to push back against the idea it was dividing people.

Palihapitiya, who was Facebook's vice president for user growth but left the [tech](#) firm in 2011, then clarified his remarks Thursday in a post on Facebook.

He said he genuinely believes Facebook is a "force for good in the world" and his comments were meant to start a conversation, not to criticize his former employer.

"Social media platforms in particular have been used and abused in ways that we, their architects, never imagined," he wrote. "Much blame has been thrown and guilt felt, but the important thing is what we as an industry do now to ensure that our impact on society continues to be a positive one."

Some experts such as Ofir Turel, a professor of information systems and decision sciences at Cal State Fullerton, have noted that [social media](#) can be addictive because the brain doesn't know what to expect when a person logs into these sites, creating excitement and curiosity. Most people naturally control the release of dopamine—a neurotransmitter that influences emotions—but for some, it's more difficult than others.

Facebook, which has about 2 billion monthly active users worldwide, said that it's focusing on making the social network more about interacting with others, rather than getting people to spend more time on the website.

The company outlined a number of new tools it's released, including a snooze feature that lets users unfollow a person, page or group for 30 days.

"We want Facebook to be a place for meaningful interactions with your friends and family—enhancing your relationships offline, not detracting from them," Ginsberg and Burke wrote.

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