

Growing mistrust threatens Facebook after data mining scandal (Update)

21 March 2018, by Rob Lever



Quitting Facebook is not always easy because of the way the social network is intertwined into the fabric of the internet

As Facebook reels from the scandal over hijacked personal data, a movement to quit the social network gathered momentum Wednesday, portending threats to one of the most powerful internet firms.

In a sign of the mood, one of those calling it quits was a high-profile co-founder of the WhatsApp messaging service acquired by Facebook in 2014 for \$19 billion.

"It is time. #deletefacebook," Brian Acton said in a tweet, using the hashtag protesting the handling of the crisis by the world's biggest social network.

The WhatsApp co-founder, who now works at the rival messaging application Signal, posted the comment amid a growing uproar over revelations that Facebook data was harvested by a British political consulting firm linked to Donald Trump's presidential campaign.

"Delete and forget. It's time to care about privacy," he said.

The huge social network also faces investigations on both sides of the Atlantic over its data practices, and a handful of lawsuits which could turn into class actions that may prove a costly distraction for Facebook.

It remains to be seen whether the uproar would lead to any significant departures, but the topic was active on social media, including on Facebook itself.

Donella Cohen posted on her Facebook page that she would be off the network by midnight.

"The latest revelations are showing just how corrupt and detrimental to society this particular platform is," she wrote.

"I hope that a new social network emerges. One that isn't so greedy as to corrupt the political process in the name of the almighty dollar."

Fabric of internet

Yet analysts noted Facebook is unlikely to fade quickly because of how it is woven into the fabric of the internet, with "like" buttons on websites, comments sections for news articles and an ad network that delivers messages to those who are not Facebook members.

The #deleteFacebook movement "is a social media feedback loop from the public—we saw the same thing with #deleteUber," said Jennifer Grygiel, a communications professor at Syracuse University.

"Sure, some people will delete Facebook, but to truly delete Facebook would mean that users would need to delete Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Messenger. This is not realistic for most people given how social media has been integrated into

everyday life."



In addition to its namesake social network, Facebook operates applications like WhatsApp, Instagram and Messenger, each with hundreds of millions of users worldwide

Sandra Proske, head of communications for the Finland-based security firm F-Secure, said it's not easy to break up with Facebook.

"If this (scandal) makes you uncomfortable you can choose to not use the site, of course," Proske wrote in a blog post.

"But given how intertwined in our lives Facebook and the sites it has acquired, including Instagram and WhatsApp, have become, you may not consider this an option. And for some people and even some countries, Facebook is the internet."

Proske and others offer suggestions on how Facebook users can improve privacy by limiting what is shared and which apps have access to their data.

Several websites offered tips on how to quit Facebook, while noting that the process is more complicated than it appears.

Facebook offers users the option to "deactivate" an account for users who want to take a break and return later, or to "delete" the account and its data

entirely.

But Facebook noted that some data such as posts on friends' timelines might remain in the system even after an account is deleted.

And longtime Facebook users could face complications on dealing with log-ins and authorizations to other websites and apps through the social network.

The tech website The Verge published a guide to deletion, advising users to download a copy of all personal data including photos and posts before quitting.

The website noted that it could take up to 90 days to fully delete an account, and that data may be inaccessible during that period.

It was unclear how many users were following through on plans to quit Facebook, which has more than two billion users worldwide.

But Roger McNamee, an early investor in Facebook, said the social network was losing the trust of its users.

"The issue is a callous disregard for the privacy rights of users and a lack of care with respect to data that had been entrusted to Facebook," McNamee told National Public Radio.

"I'm not sure exactly what's going on here, but I'm afraid there is a systemic problem with the algorithms and the business model of Facebook that allow bad actors to cause harm to innocent users of Facebook."

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