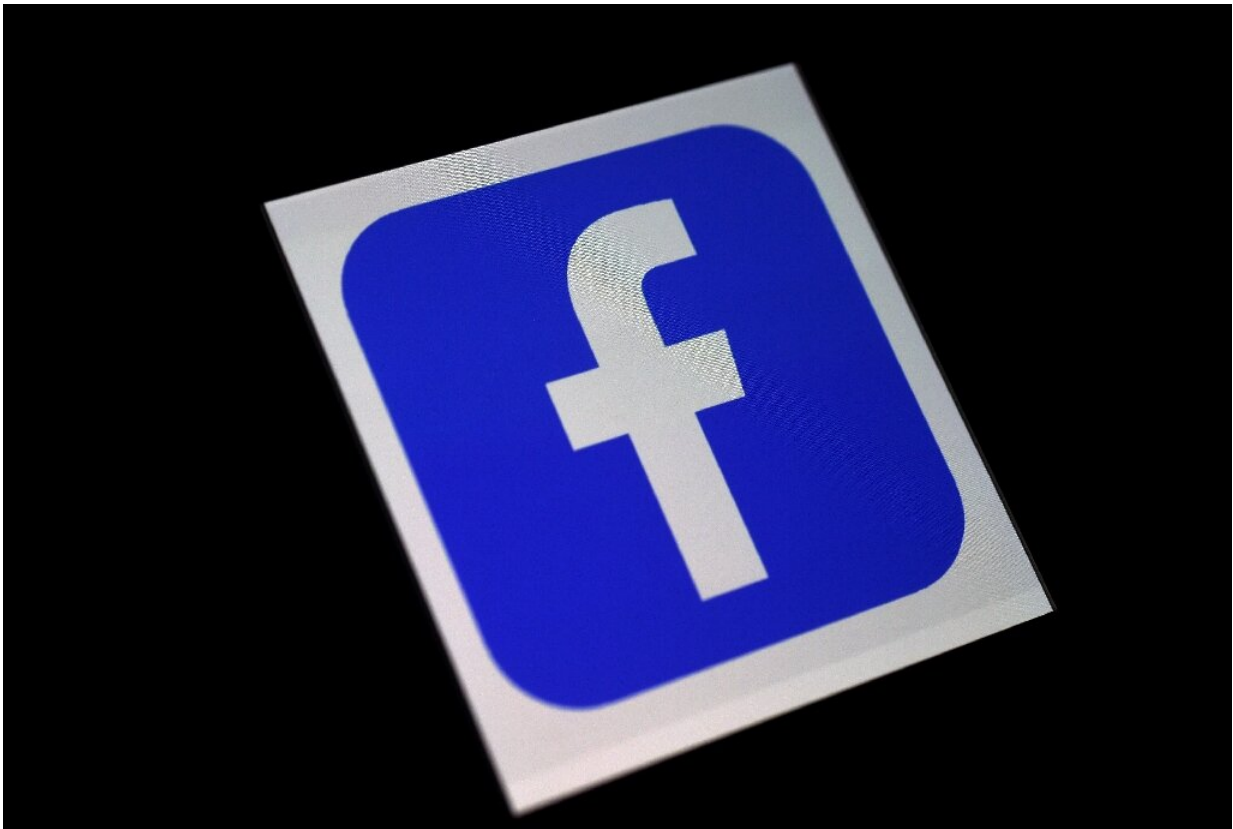


Facebook encourages groups in time of division

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Facebook is marking the 10th anniversary of groups, which were growing in popularity even before the pandemic made online socializing a cultural norm

Facebook on Thursday said it is raising the profile of member groups, hoping people with different views will find common ground on the

leading social network.

It also announced new software tools to help administrators keep conversations civil in groups, which are used by more than 1.8 billion people monthly.

The company announced the new moves, which include updates to help administrators stop caustic posts as well as find sponsors, during its annual Facebook Communities Summit, which was held virtually this year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"Groups are allowing people to engage with very different perspectives and backgrounds," Fidji Simo, head of Facebook App, told AFP.

"It's something we can use now more than ever."

Parents who bond in groups devoted to remote teaching for their children, for example, could end up hashing out opposing views on school reopenings or mandatory vaccinations.

"Obviously, with different perspectives comes some safety challenges," Simo said, addressing concerns that groups can also be used to amplify dangerous communities or spread [harmful content](#).

Facebook is marking the 10th anniversary of groups this month, which were growing in popularity even before the pandemic made online socializing a cultural norm.

Groups have seen a surge for several reasons in recent months, including out of support for the Black community as the country faces a reckoning on race and police brutality.

According to Simo, groups devoted to quirky pandemic trends and light-

hearted content have also grown during the health crisis.

One group in which people pretend to be ants in the same colony was closing in on two million members on Thursday, Simo added.

More than 70 million people are involved in building and running Facebook groups. Private groups require members to be accepted, while anyone on the social network is free to take part in public groups.

A new "admin assist" will let group administrators automatically decline posts.

Administrators can also now organize content by topic with hashtags, with the social network testing ways to make posts in public groups more discoverable elsewhere on Facebook.

The company has also added a certification course to educate administrators.

Administrators "spend many hours a week making sure communities are well managed," Simo said.

The "are at the heart of every community."

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