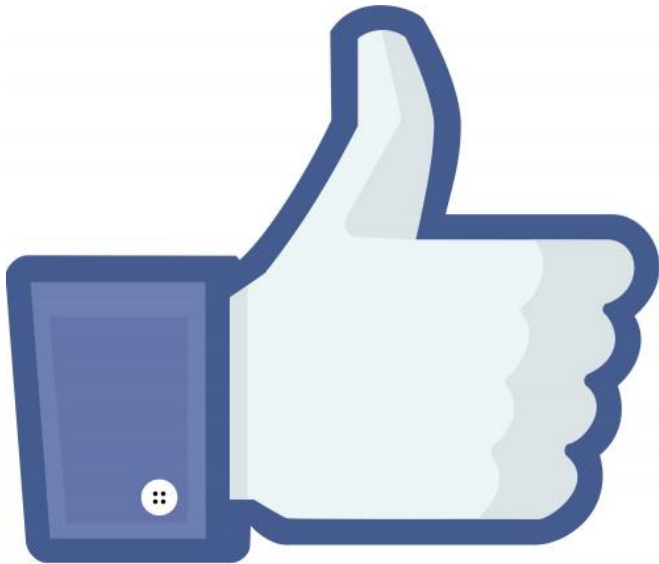


Facebook is making a big change to your news feed

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Facebook is radically altering the formula that determines what bubbles to the top of people's news feed, part of sweeping changes the giant social network has planned to address growing controversy over the role it plays in people's lives and in society.

Soon, Facebook says you will see more status updates from friends and family that spark meaningful social exchanges—parents discussing what bedtime stories to read to children, a friend seeking advice on places to travel or a newsy article or video on a topic you care about. What Facebook wants you to spend less time doing: passively scrolling through updates on your timeline, reading articles and watching videos, but not interacting with others.

"Recently we've gotten feedback from our community that public content—posts from businesses, brands and media—is crowding out the

personal moments that lead us to connect more with each other," Facebook founder and chief executive Mark Zuckerberg wrote in a Facebook post Thursday. "I'm changing the goal I give our product teams from focusing on helping you find relevant content to helping you have more meaningful social interactions."

Zuckerberg has been laying the groundwork for making that fundamental shift in all of Facebook's products. He recently told investors he wants Facebook to encourage "meaningful social interactions" and downplayed the importance of how much time [people](#) spend there.

That's because the move could come at a high price. Zuckerberg anticipates Facebook's 2 billion-plus users will spend less time on and be less engaged with the social network—including watching videos, a lucrative new revenue stream. But, he says, "if we do the right thing, I believe that will be good for our community and our business over the long term, too."

Pressure has been building on Facebook and its CEO as the toxic content flowing through Facebook—violent live videos, fabricated news articles and divisive messages from Russian operatives to influence the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign—has been blamed for ripping holes in the social fabric.

Another wave of criticism pummeling Facebook: that the company's products exploit vulnerabilities in human psychology to hook people on [social media](#), hijacking their time and attention and undermining their well-being.

Facebook has begun to acknowledge that some social media use can be harmful to mental health, a backflip for the Silicon Valley company which, until recently, rejected a growing body of research showing that Facebook use can spur negative feelings. Last month, Facebook released its own

research demonstrating that when people connect with each other on social media, it has a positive effect. On the other hand, passively scrolling through social media does not.

The concession did not happen in a vacuum. In November, Sean Parker, the founding president of Facebook, took aim at Facebook in an interview with Axios, saying he and other executives created a "social-validation feedback loop" to make Facebook psychologically addictive.

Early Facebook executive and former vice president of growth, Chamath Palihapitiya, also accused Facebook of creating "short-term, dopamine-driven feedback loops" that are "destroying how society works." He later softened his remarks.

But that negativity may already be showing up in Facebook's numbers.

Pivotal Research analyst Brian Wieser says his analysis of recent Nielsen data shows consumption of Facebook declined in August and September. It's unclear if that's because Facebook already accounted for such a big chunk of our digital lives or because people are growing increasingly frustrated with it.

"Facebook is responding to a decline in consumption, not just encouraging a decline in consumption," Wieser says.

Tracy Garza, a neurodiversity consultant in the Bay Area, says she's using Facebook a lot less than before. She says she's turned off by Facebook's unrelenting push to make money off, well, everything.

"They don't realize there comes a time when many of us are going to say 'I'm just tired of being the product here,'" Garza said.

The company's mounting difficulties prompted Zuckerberg to declare last week that his personal challenge for the year—which in the past has run the gamut from learning Mandarin to slaughtering his own meat—would be to fix what ails Facebook. A big part of that effort would be "making sure that time

spent on Facebook is time well spent," he said.

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Facebook constantly tweaks its computer algorithms to maintain interest in its news feed, the company's main attention-getter. It uses a process called ranking to determine which posts show up in people's news feed and in what order based on what Facebook thinks they will be most interested in. In recent years, the company made a series of changes to its news-feed algorithm to surface more content posted by friends and family.

Those changes undercut publishers, businesses and celebrities who come to the giant social network to gain new audiences and revenue streams but have seen their ability to reach Facebook users continue to decrease. Facebook says these pages may see another decline in traffic being referred and videos being watched, though the impact will vary depending on the type of content they produce and how people interact with it.

"It's gotten to the point where there is so much content in news feed—media content, things that aren't necessarily from your friends or from people you care about—that you end up being less engaged in it," said Debra Williamson, an analyst with research firm eMarketer. "I see that in myself. I see my news feed and say, 'Where's all my friends' stuff?'"

Zuckerberg says people can expect to see less public content such as posts from businesses, brands and publishers. And the public content they do see more will be held to the same standard. "It should encourage meaningful interactions between

people," he said.

Fewer videos watched could crimp Facebook's aggressive push to become a major hub of video content. It is spending hundreds of millions on original programming and mounting a major live video push to fulfill Zuckerberg mission to turn Facebook into a "video-first" platform. The lure: the billions of dollars in advertising that are expected to migrate to digital video from television that could help make up for an expected slowdown in Facebook's core business.

John Hegeman, vice president of product management for Facebook's [news feed](#), shrugged off the business implications of people watching fewer videos. Facebook displayed its willingness to sacrifice profit to tackle big problems when it announced late last year a plan to hire thousands of content moderators to deal with Russian interference and misinformation on the platform.

"We continue to think video is a great format to share what's going on in your life with friends," Hegeman said. "At the same time, we also want to make sure the video we watch on Facebook doesn't interfere with the primary thing that Facebook is about."

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