



WE UNPLUGGED FROM FACEBOOK IN 2018. HERE'S WHY YOU SHOULD TOO.



Facebook Papers reveal company knew it profited from sex trafficking but took limited action to stop it.

Facebook's formula prioritized anger and ended up spreading misinformation. Facebook froze as anti-vaccine comments swarmed users.

These are just a few of the headlines that have emerged in recent days after former Facebook employees leaked documents and came forward with evidence of the role the world's largest social media network played in the January 6th Capitol insurrection, the way it permitted the spread of false information about life-saving COVID vaccines, and other misdeeds.

As the world again turns a critical eye on the company, it's important not to forget that these are not Facebook's first transgressions. In fact, it was Facebook's role in the Cambridge Analytica scandal that ultimately convinced the National Education Policy Center to delete its Facebook account on March 27, 2018.

The decision was not made lightly. As a policy institute with the mission of communicating research, NEPC had benefitted from Facebook's size and ability to widely share content. A video that NEPC produced about the [Schools of Opportunity](#) project, for example, went viral on Facebook earlier in 2018, leading to more than 1 million views of this program's work to highlight high-quality, equitable approaches to secondary education.

However, as NEPC explained in a [2018 news release](#), "Facebook's benefits are overwhelmed

by problems inherent in its business model, its failure to safeguard personal information, and its lack of transparency and accountability.”

Of particular concern is Facebook’s approach to students and schools. The recent round of revelations included [congressional testimony](#) from whistleblower Frances Haugen that Facebook knew that its Instagram platform damaged the mental health and body images of teenage girls. [And for years now](#), NEPC researchers have been raising questions about the information Facebook collects on young people who are required to use the site for school-related activities.

“I can’t delete my Facebook account,” a student told [Alex Molnar](#) and [Faith Boninger](#), who direct NEPC’s Commercialism in Education Research Unit. “My school activities have Facebook groups that I have to access. Maybe I can delete my account when I graduate.”

“Students are tied to Facebook by their school-related activities, and they unwillingly and usually unwittingly provide Facebook with information that is used to limit what they are exposed to online and funnel them to worldviews that will reward Facebook’s clients,” Molnar noted in 2018.

Molnar and Boninger have also [expressed concerns](#) about the Chan-Zuckerberg Initiative (CZI), the [limited liability corporation](#) launched by Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg and his wife Priscilla Chan. Boninger observes:

At the same time that Facebook is trying to increase its number of young users, CZI is actively creating and [funding educational initiatives](#) that extract masses of data from young people as they do their schoolwork. The uses to which these data are put are not disclosed.

Molnar draws a connection that is even more direct: “CZI is essentially Facebook. It’s a corporation, not a charity. The best way to understand CZI’s education initiatives is from the perspective of Facebook’s corporate goals.”

Back in 2018, Molnar and Boninger [cautioned](#), “With respect to the digital internet platforms, it is often said that if you’re not paying for a product, you are the product. We’re especially concerned when the product is children.” They also issued a warning that presaged many of the new revelations:

As we have learned to our cost, Facebook’s “engagement” algorithms nudge users to become ever more extreme in their views and behaviors. This manipulation is especially problematic and potent for children, whose worldviews are still developing. Children in and outside of school are now routinely subjected to all the marketing firepower that money can buy. They are without recourse as their personal data are gathered and sold on. Using these data, advertisers attempt to shape their attitudes about how they should think about their families, friendships, romantic relationships, environment, society, and themselves. Facebook’s business model was developed to help marketers take full advantage of its feed to manipulate its users in these ways. This is bad for us all; when applied to children, it is intolerable.

Boninger today argues that it's time, in 2021,

for educators to reconsider Facebook as a communication tool of choice. Students need the organizations responsible for them, their schools, to step up—to stop pulling them into the Facebook ecosystem and exposing them to the harms that Facebook causes. Mr. Zuckerberg has been moving fast. The question before us now is: How much longer are we going to let him and others like him continue to break things?

NEPC Resources on School Commercialism

This newsletter is made possible in part by support provided by the Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice: <http://www.greatlakescenter.org>

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