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### **Facebook or Fakebook?**

I would like to open this to say that it's incredibly likely that this question was written before the Cambridge Analytica controversy. In summation, it was found that, not only did Facebook analyze our information, they unknowingly sold 50 million people's information to data analysis firm Cambridge Analytica, a political analysis firm with close ties to President Trump's campaign.

On July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016, YouTube user Neville uploaded a two-and-a-half-minute long video in which he and his wife discuss purchasing cat food in order to produce results. The couple does not own cats, and they have never looked up cat food online. Two days later, as said in the video, the first ad for cat food appeared. Evidence of this continuing has appeared on Reddit as recently as two months ago. On December 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> of last year, Reddit user TibetanBowlHealing provided two examples of Facebook listening in on ads. Firstly, they gave their phone audible input on professional photography for 45 minutes, to receive various recommended users and pictures related to professional photography on Instagram (owned by Facebook). When TibetanBowlHealing replicated the experiment on the 30<sup>th</sup>, they instead talked about explicit bourbon brands at lunch. Like clockwork, rum ads appeared on the user's Instagram. Either way, undefined microphone activity from Facebook was definitely detected by their software, confirming the user's beliefs.

So, at minimum, we have established that Facebook does not have our best interests or our privacy in mind. Between undisclosed sharing of information and possible monitoring, Facebook had been up to sketchy things. Knowing this, we should look at the unwitting support of bots and injected propaganda.

Doubtlessly, Facebook did not intentionally assert a political position. As a media outlet, Facebook should be impartial, otherwise they lose followers and users. The user wants to feel like they can express their opinion without being alienated by the network. This can be easily expressed through small or large Facebook groups. However, this would result in the main form of infiltration. Private Facebook echo chambers – chambers of thought where your opinion is echoed – mean that, in many cases, people will not look at a story and take it with a grain of salt. Like minded individuals *must* have your best interest in mind, right? Then these stories are spread to family and friends prolifically. Many of these stories are true, but then we have the issue of fake news or tabloid news in the media, ranging from which celebrities are gay to which opponents of Hillary Clinton killed themselves with two bullets to the back of the head (no, really).

Are these echo chambers Facebook's fault? While they did make these Facebook groups, the fact is that they really aren't. If the people in these groups feel like they do not fit on Facebook, they will go somewhere else and hear many of the same things.

Another thing is, many people take everything very seriously, like with satire. My favorite term to come from the satirical news satire organization *The Onion* is the term *eating the onion* or taking the bait. A less *The Onion* related example would be not understanding that the Stephen Colbert character is just that – a character (which did happen at the 2006 White House Correspondents' Dinner). Basically, people who fail to understand basic satire should probably not be counted on to understand that an internet article claiming Washington D.C.'s pizza restaurants are a cover for liberal child rapists should probably be doubted.

To clarify what I have been implying, I believe that, no, Facebook should not be held responsible for things on their site. People can get angry at Mark Zuckerberg for dozens of things – stealing the original idea, letting your phone listen in on your conversations, being a general horrible person – but it is not Facebook's fault that these articles appear, and it is not Facebook's fault for not knowing that bots

were infiltrating their system. It is not Facebook's fault if someone posts a misinformed article. In fact, it is the fault of the consumer for eating the onion. While we may find excessive reasons to dislike Facebook, blaming them for the consumers of social media for its original purpose is frankly ridiculous. The Facebook team should not be the babysitter for their users, they need to develop their own opinion and their own knowledge of what is real and what is not. Even if they wanted to, the scope of such an operation would cost millions of dollars where someone could simply use critical thinking instead. I certainly think that efforts to remove false or bot accounts *like they have always done* should continue, but they should not be held accountable for people using their service.