



The Facebook News Feed is Changing to Favor Person to Person Engagement

ebook author

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"It looks like the Facebook News Feed is changing to prefer user-to-user engagement and squeeze out brands and passive activity (which isn't clearly defined) and possibly even ads, though there could be some caveats there for brands like news and groups and live videos, but we really don't know yet, they could all be screwed, too, but let's chill and wait a while to see what happens" was my original title.

That's how freaking convoluted this is.

Facebook dropped a potential bombshell of an announcement today — at least on brands and publishers. A major change is being made to the news feed that will favor people and negatively impact the visibility of page content.

My head is spinning for one primary reason: As often is the case with Facebook announcements, it's light on details. Lots of words, but few specifics. Without specifics, we fill in the blanks. And when we fill in the blanks, we all start interpreting the announcement differently based on our own biases and experiences.

A great example of this is [how Josh Constine of TechCrunch interpreted the announcement](#). We'll get to that in a minute.

Before I go any further, let me say one thing: We don't know. It sounds bad. But we don't know exactly how this will impact your brand or mine until this actually rolls out.

Let's do our best to decipher this. Step by step, let's go through the announcement, the background, what it all means, and a few of my own personal thoughts.

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[NOTE: See my post about [how your brand page should react](#) to this change.]

A Message from Mark Zuckerberg

You can read Mark Zuckerberg's entire message here:

A few primary points...

"...we've always put friends and family at the core of the experience."

"But 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."

Immediately, we see the problem. Facebook sees person-to-person interaction as the "core" Facebook experience. The brand stuff is fine, too, but there's a lot of it. And it's starting to take over.

"The research shows that when we use social media to connect with people we care about, it can be good for our well-being."

That's good! But...

"...passively reading articles or watching videos — even if they're entertaining or informative — may not be as good."

Zuckerberg implies here that interaction with people is inherently healthy whereas interacting with typical brand content (articles, videos, "entertaining or informative" content) is often passive and not so good.

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I guess that means changes are coming...

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"The first changes you'll see will be in News Feed, where you can expect to see more from your friends, family and groups."

Something for brands to keep in mind. If you get slammed by this change, groups could be your way back in. But that also could be one more frontier for [brands to manipulate and ruin](#).

"As we roll this out, you'll see less public content like posts from businesses, brands, and media. And the public content you see more will be held to the same standard — it should encourage meaningful interactions between people."

Confusing. You're going to see less content from brands, businesses, and media. Time to start preparing for the worst. But then a sudden ray of sunshine. There will be some public content that we see more? As long as it encourages "meaningful interactions between people"?

Zuck continues to suggest that despite saying we'll see less brand content, maybe not all brands are screwed...

"For example, there are many tight-knit communities around TV shows and sports teams. We've seen people interact way more around live videos than regular ones. Some news helps start conversations on important issues."

Sounds great! We have a chance. But just as you were getting your hopes up...

"But too often today, watching video, reading news or getting a page update is just a passive experience."

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So, it sounds like live videos are still good. But other video — and news — are bad because they lead to a “passive experience.”

“Now, I want to be clear: by making these changes, I expect the time people spend on Facebook and some measures of engagement will go down. But I also expect the time you do spend on Facebook will be more valuable.”

Is this true??

These changes are meant to improve the user experience. If you're having a better experience on Facebook, would you spend less time on the platform? Or does this have something to do with the mindless trash that leads to online addiction? Less of that, so less time? Not sure.

Broken Down by TechCrunch

The media source I trust most when it comes down to Facebook topics is Josh Constine of TechCrunch. But as I read [his interpretation of the announcement](#), I'm either dense or there is still plenty that I don't know or understand.

From Josh:

“Facebook is making a huge change to its News Feed algorithm to prioritize friends and posts that spark comments between them at the expense of public content, news outlets, and importantly, the total time spent and ads you see on the social network.”

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Nearly all of that sentence is consistent with what I read in Zuck's announcement, except for one key word: "ads." Nowhere did Zuck mention ads. And neither did Adam Mosseri, Head of News Feed, in his [News Feed FYI announcement](#).

Would this change impact ads? I don't know why it would, unless Facebook chooses to show fewer of them. But I didn't see anything that would indicate that.

One wildcard here is that diminished organic reach could increase competition and costs. But that still doesn't mean fewer ads.

Josh continues:

"Live videos generating discussion, star social media creators, celebrities, Groups posts, local business events, and trusted news sources are other types of content that should get a boost."

Is this true??

"Star social media creators" are public figures and pages. News sources are pages. Celebrities have pages. Local business events come from pages. Trusted news sources are pages. They aren't people. Why would they get a boost?

Video Explanation

This video explanation from Mosseri does a better job of helping me grasp what might be happening here. Watch it...

A few primary points from the video...

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Mosseri says:

“Now, we’ll also consider whether a potential interaction is between two people or between a person and a page, which are the accounts run by businesses, organizations, and public figures. Person to person will be more valuable than person to page.”

That doesn't leave any room, in my interpretation, for live videos from pages, local business events, news stories, etc. All of that falls under the “businesses, organizations, and public figures” that should see a negative impact of this update.

“Connections with people in your network will get the biggest boost because interacting with people you’re close to is more meaningful.”

Once again, no mention of any caveats for pages.

“We’re also going to prioritize exchanges that took more time and care.”

This is a key point that is critical to this update. For far too long, weaknesses in the news feed have been exploited with click bait headlines, engagement bait, and other manipulations from brands. Typically, they get lots of engagement as a result, but not strong engagement that would take “more time and care.”

The key here appears to not only be comments, but thoughtful comments. Or, from the video, “typing out a long and thoughtful reply.”

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Once again, passive scrolling is bad. And what seems to be implied is that watching video without sound isn't valuable. Even clicking to watch the video may not be a strong signal. And I'm even thinking that reactions (like, love, haha, etc.) aren't going to get nearly as much weight as they may have previously.

Engagement Bait: Don't Even Think About It

Facebook seems to be a step ahead of marketers these days. They're sick of us. They're tired of making updates, only to see marketers exploit a weakness. As a result, yet another change needs to be made to the news feed.

Facebook sees the next flurry coming. "Oh, comments are good? Sweet! Comment below to be eligible for a free iPad!"

Nope. From [Mosseri's announcement](#)...

"Using 'engagement-bait' to goad people into commenting on posts is not a meaningful interaction, and we will continue to demote these posts in News Feed."

What Does This Mean For Your Page?

Let me make this easy for you:

We. Don't. Know.

It certainly sounds like people will be favored over pages in the news feed. We've heard this before. It certainly sounds like organic reach may take a deep dive. But, depending on how you interpret this, there may be room for brands that "do it right."

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In case you're wondering, no. This is not proof that Facebook is implementing that catastrophic [Explore tab](#) test that moved all brand content. Once again, Mosseri is right on top of it..

I don't know if your organic reach is going to disappear. I don't know if this will impact ads. Facebook has attempted to make changes to the news feed in the past that didn't seem to change much of anything. So, we really don't know.

We wait. We test. Then? We talk about it.

My Gut Reaction

I hate reacting to something that is so ambiguous, but I'm going to do it anyway...

Not everyone uses Facebook the same way. I purposefully see more brand and publisher content in my news feed than posts from friends. That's only partly because I'm an antisocial jerk. But it's mainly because I care most about political and sports news.

That's the stuff I actually want to see. I don't comment on those posts. I don't provide "long and thoughtful replies." Will I stop seeing that content?

If I do, that would kind of suck. That would be bad for my Facebook experience.

Facebook, of course, recommends using the "See First in News Feed" option that will still apply, even for brands.

But, come on. No one is going to do that. Even I won't do that.

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My Philosophical Reaction

Something needed to be done.

I have an admission to make: I don't enjoy Facebook from the user's perspective nearly as much as I once did.

Granted, it's crazy that I've been using the site for about 11 years now. I was obsessed with the platform in the early days to connect with friends. Loved everything about it.

Then I got older. The world got crazier. Brands started ruining it. Trolls took over. Everyone became a political expert. Fake news. Click bait.

It just isn't nearly as fun for me as it once was. As a more "mature" user, I'm much more careful about what I post. As a result, what I post on my personal profile is usually boring (there was a time when I posted mindless updates CONSTANTLY). I rarely comment. And I NEVER comment on a page post.

Instead, I use Facebook — as a user — passively now. I do exactly what Facebook doesn't want me to do. And they're right: Using Facebook passively results in a negative experience.

Facebook has a point. Most brand content really does suck now. When it's "engaging," it's often manipulative. News publishers prey on our biggest fears and pain points. Everything is breaking news. Controversy. Shocking.

It's freaking exhausting.

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I want to escape. Using Facebook as a user right now is the complete opposite of escape. But I'm hooked. I can't leave. Dopamine and stuff.

Facebook is in a tough spot here. I want my Facebook experience to be better. But is Facebook simply a product of a sick, ridiculous world right now that makes us all depressed and panicked? Or is there something Facebook can do to help us enjoy it all again?

I guess that's what Facebook is trying to figure out. I appreciate the attempt, especially if it may be at the expense of their own revenues.

Your Turn

This is going to be a controversial announcement. There will be hysteria. There will be panic. The reaction will be very similar to the the comments you read under a political post on Facebook. It's going to be nuts.

What are your calm, measured thoughts?

Let me know in the comments below!

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[Jon Loomer](#) is a digital marketing consultant with a unique perspective on social media. He was introduced to Facebook in 2007 while with the NBA (back before Pages) and has been using Facebook for business ever since. Stay in touch by liking his Facebook Page ([Jon Loomer Digital](#)).