

Kretchmar's Korner

The Facebook Dilemma, David Kretchmar, Computer Hardware Technician, Sun City Summerlin Computer Club NV

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Facebook can feel relatively innocent and passive. It's an application we use to get information, keep in touch with friends and family, and be entertained by posts from Facebook friends or our own news feed. It is easy to forget that Facebook is an advertising business, with interests and purposes of its own. Before recent revelations we might have forgotten that Facebook uses information it has collected from us for profit. Its power over our lives is largely hidden under a veneer of passivity and electronic voyeurism.

We have recently learned that Facebook was a major provider of "Fake news." This is especially concerning since well over half of Facebook users get much of their news from Facebook. We now know that Russia used Facebook in an attempt to influence the 2016 election.

Also, it has been revealed that Facebook shared a massive amount of user data with a political consulting company, Cambridge Analytica, and the information was used to fine tune the campaigns of politicians.

Whether you feel President Trump's victory was a good or bad thing, Facebook's role in the 2016 election should be a matter of concern. In a democracy, voters need accurate information to make a reasoned judgement. Forces outside of our country should not be able to unduly influence American voters.



Facebook has a deeply addictive impact on its users, one that we should be more aware of than we probably are. Facebook has already done a great deal to shape our minds, bodies and communities. Facebook's News Feed is meant to encourage users to stay online — past the point of fun or getting useful data. Some former Facebook employees have alleged that "the platform's features were consciously engineered to induce a dopamine hit to keep people hooked." Social scientists compare technologies

such as Facebook to slot machines and other addictive habits in terms of their impact on our minds and bodies — as well as on our inability to just stay away.

It's easy to think of Facebook as a blank slate on which the thoughts, pictures and videos of our friends and family appear. But there is much more going on with Facebook as with many social networks. When it comes to getting information, the platform matters as much as the actual content.

Facebook profits more when we remain on its platform longer, watching ads and videos, playing games, liking posts, and messaging our friends. Facebook makes more money when we are addicted, even if studies show that inordinate amounts of time online are bad for our mental and physical health.

Cyberbullying and online peer pressure have deeply affected younger users on Facebook and other social media platforms. Electronic influenced depression and anxiety are affecting older social media users as well. We can barely imagine how that bad influence will grow and change as Facebook incorporates artificial intelligence and virtual reality.

