



National Education Policy Center Deletes Its Facebook Account and Calls for Strict Data Protections Plus Public Regulation and Oversight of Digital Platforms

Key Takeaway: 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.

Find Documents:

Press Release: <http://nepc.info/node/9115>

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BOULDER, CO (March 27, 2018) - The National Education Policy Center (NEPC) will delete its Facebook account on Wednesday March 28. We have already removed social sharing via Facebook from the NEPC website and our other communication tools.

While Facebook has many benefits, we feel compelled to disassociate ourselves from the invasive data mining and the third-party targeting of users inherent in its business model. The goal of the NEPC is to provide high-quality information in support of democratic deliberation. Deceitful micro-targeted propaganda is made possible by Facebook data and undermines democracy. Our reading of the evidence and record tells us that neither Facebook nor any other opaque, unregulated, and unaccountable private entity should have control over the private data of billions of people. Whatever services are provided by the Facebook platform are overwhelmed by Facebook’s business model, its lack of transparency, its failure to safeguard the personal information of its users, and its lack of accountability.

NEPC annual reports on Schoolhouse Commercialism have highlighted the intensifying [surveillance](#) culture and other dangers to [student privacy](#) in the digital age, and Facebook has emerged as a primary culprit. It would be disingenuous for us to use Facebook to promote those reports and other NEPC work.

We don’t pretend that this was an easy step. Communication of research lies at the heart of NEPC’s mission, and social media are a big part of communications—with Facebook positioned as a dominant social media platform.

Last month, NEPC’s “Schools of Opportunity” project benefited hugely from a [short video](#) that went viral on Facebook, garnering over a million views.

Yet the [more we learned](#) about [Facebook’s data gathering](#), and in particular the [Cambridge Analytica scandal](#), the more we couldn’t avoid the conclusion that Facebook’s benefits are far outweighed by its dangers. Facebook is designed in ways that are inherently troubling. As Facebook’s first president warned, “God only knows what it’s doing to [our children’s brains](#).” He disclosed that Facebook was designed to create a “social validation feedback loop” that we now know does indeed alter brain chemistry by triggering [dopamine](#) hits each time a posting is liked. And marketers are [taking full advantage](#).

Consider also this passage from a recent article in [The Guardian](#) (internal links included):

That Silicon Valley parents use the money they earn from tech to send their children to [tech-free schools](#) is no secret. But such qualms have not stopped the tech companies themselves from continuing to push their products on to other people’s children, both through partnerships with [school districts](#) and special [apps for children](#) as young as six.

In January 2018, the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood sent Mark Zuckerberg a [letter](#), signed by over 100 child advocates, educators, and experts in child development, requesting that Facebook discontinue its Messenger Kids app for children. A [growing body of research](#) demonstrates that excessive use of digital devices and social media is harmful to children and teens, making it likely that this new app—designed to encourage greater use of digital devices and social media among children—will undermine children’s healthy development. Facebook continues to promote Messenger Kids.

This problem is much larger than Facebook, but we cannot use that fact to justify inaction. We cannot, in good conscience, continue to lend tacit support to Facebook. NEPC has concluded that encouraging our readers to provide information that will be used by Facebook and its clients to tailor and limit information to which our readers will then be exposed contradicts our defined organizational mission, which is to support democratic deliberation about education policy.

We at NEPC encourage other education organizations to consider whether they too should delete their Facebook accounts, and we call upon policy makers to develop policies that provide strict public oversight of social media platforms.

Schools and Digital Platforms

NEPC’s own publications describe how digital platforms work through schools to pull children into the surveillance economy – an unregulated economy that these platforms have worked to construct and from which they benefit financially. “Students are offered no choice,” explains Faith Boninger, co-author with Alex Molnar of NEPC’s commercialism reports. As one student told Boninger and Molnar, “I can’t delete my Facebook account. My school activities have Facebook groups that I have to access. Maybe I can delete my account when I graduate.”

Molnar, who is NEPC’s Publications Director, warns that “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 on-line and funnel them to worldviews that will reward Facebook’s clients.”

Boninger and Molnar add that their research has shown that digital platforms being promoted for school use are neither well understood by educators nor adequately regulated by existing policy and law. Says Molnar, “the kind of abuses inherent in Facebook’s business model, management structure, and lack of transparency are, without

question, also occurring in schools and classrooms every day via social networks and digital platforms.”

Learn more about NEPC research on digital marketing and data gathering in schools at <http://nepc.colorado.edu/ceru-home>.

The following organizations also have resources on data gathering from children and in schools: [Campaign for Commercial-Free Childhood](#), [Center for Digital Democracy](#), [Electronic Frontier Foundation](#), [Electronic Privacy Information Center](#), and the [Parent Coalition for Student Privacy](#).

We encourage people to distribute this announcement as widely as possible and to continue to share the work of the National Education Policy Center with others.

The National Education Policy Center (NEPC), housed at the University of Colorado Boulder School of Education, produces and disseminates high-quality, peer-reviewed research to inform education policy discussions. Visit us at: <http://nepc.colorado.edu>