

# Facebook's "coronavirus problem"



Like



Love



Haha



OMG!



Wow



Sad



Angry

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Facebook, instead of being the great connector of humans across borders and distances, is more often a hub of controversies. With a "misinformation outbreak" accompanying the Covid-19 pandemic, Facebook has now become a perfect mish-mash of facts and misinformation. The way Facebook tackles this problem should be dissected and examined to see what it gets wrong.

### How Facebook's digital inspectors failed

With such a large flow of data through its servers, Facebook uses artificial intelligence (AI) to flag posts as spam, inappropriate, etc. Suffice it to say, AI is not perfect. The problem becomes even worse as Facebook's human moderators are on home lockdown and cannot work at their usual efficiency.

The spread of misinformation has been so widespread and the data traffic being so much that even Facebook's tech has failed. The result was the activation of a kill-switch that deleted most Covid-19 posts- factual and misleading. This created an information vacuum.

The problem was supposedly "fixed", yet I found a couple of posts on my news feed regarding Covid-19 hoaxes. Many private Facebook groups have been formed with an invite-only entry where Facebook puts little to no inspection. The problem has certainly gone out of control and to a point where leaders and experts are urging Facebook's users to stop sharing false information. **Facebook's WhatsApp — a trend continued**

WhatsApp, one of Facebook's acquired ventures, does not have a good track record

either. In this scenario, one of WhatsApp's strengths becomes its weakness. WhatsApp boasts its end-to-end message encryption between users where a third party cannot view the messages. Facebook brings this up as one of the reasons for not being able to filter messages. The problem becomes even more difficult as some messages (hoaxes) are not shared from pages, but are rather organic and composed from the user itself. WhatsApp has appointed employees for policing within large groups and also has a dedicated chat to provide correct information to its users. Its effectiveness is yet to be seen.

### Conspiracy theorists on Facebook

Facebook has done little on moderating posts from "online Sherlocks". You will see one-page long analyses almost every day on your news feed. Whether this is fake news

or not is just another discussion but it is something based on pure speculation and lack of evidence.

### References

1. Forbes.com (March 17, 2020). *Facebook Deleting Coronavirus Posts, Leading To Charges Of Censorship.*
2. The Washington Post (March 25, 2020). *Facebook sent home thousands of human moderators due to the coronavirus. Now the algorithms are in charge.*
3. CNN Business (March 19, 2020). *Facebook has a coronavirus problem. It's WhatsApp.*

*Osaman loves thinking about psychology, tech, and loves playing games. To provide feedback and have a small discussion over a hypothetical cup of tea, mail him at osamanbinahmed@gmail.com*

# The Pressure to be Productive

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*Recently, a post went viral on Facebook that claimed something along the lines of "If you aren't learning something new right now, time was never the problem, you are."*

Parents are raising hell as their kids run on different time zones, teachers are urging students to finish up inhumane amounts of assignments, and the internet is filling up with more "things to do during quarantine" articles than the fake WhatsApp news that our parents thrive on.

Seeing our social media feeds filled with dalгона coffee and song covers might feel like we aren't doing anything worthwhile. But more importantly, there's also the pressure of not being able to do enough to help. We sit helplessly at home while healthcare workers and public servants put their lives on the line.

During the first week of quarantine, I made a list of all the writing and reading I was going to get done, now that I had so much "extra time". For a while I put a lot of pressure on myself to get all the things done. Then I'd slack off for a day or two, only to be weighed down by my unfulfilled expectations.

This idea of basing our self-worth on how many things we cross off our to-do list can be incredibly toxic. The anxiety



about "wasting our time" that accompanies the need to be productive is valid. It's an inherent instinct to define ourselves by our accomplishments because that's what we've been taught as children. However, the narrative is neither right nor reasonable.

The crisis is scary and unusual. We are going through each day with fear for our loved ones, and worries about the more vulnerable and less privileged ones. For many, the future is uncertain, with exams cancelled and workplaces shut down. Every

day is a long navigation through morbid news and an evolving deadly virus. A global pandemic isn't something to make the most out of, so it's fine if you don't finish writing a novel or learn the violin.

As for doing our shares, we need to focus on the things we can do: making donations wherever possible, calling up close ones to check up on them, or just keeping ourselves hydrated.

While we are happy for the ones who are able to utilise this time to learn new skills and enthusiastically partake in comment wars (finally!), the habit of setting those same expectations for yourself is unrealistic. If using this time to get things done isn't escapism for you, or if it stresses you out, you aren't lazy to want to slow down. The time calls for us to be kinder to ourselves, to take breaks and practice gratitude. Some days the little things we're able to do will have to be enough.

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