

Facebook Zero and the "People's Receiver"

by

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on

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"All of Germany hears the Führer with the People's Receiver," reads a World War II propaganda poster. It was advertising the Volksempfänger - or, the People's Receiver - described[m] by the US Holocaust Museum which contains one of the radios in its collection in Washington D.C. as:

Goebbels's ministry recognized the tremendous promise of radio for propaganda. It heavily subsidized the production of the inexpensive "People's Receiver" (Volksempfänger) to facilitate



sales. By early 1938, the number of radios in German homes surpassed more than 9 million, roughly one for every two German households. Three years later, this figure rose to almost 15 million, providing 50 million Germans with regular radio reception.

The radio lacked the capability to receive foreign radio stations, and on its dial, only German and Austrian stations were marked. This - in conjunction with radio jamming efforts - was a deliberate attempt to confine the German public's access to information to only that emanating from Berlin.

According to archives maintained by Yale University, during the Nuremberg trials after the war, Nazi Germany's Minister of Armaments and War Production, Albert Speer would remark (emphasis added):

Hitler's dictatorship differed in one fundamental point from all its predecessors in history. His was the first dictatorship in the present period of modern technical development, a dictatorship which made complete use of all technical means in a perfect manner for the domination of its own nation. Through technical devices such as radio and loudspeaker 80 million people were deprived of independent thought. It was thereby possible to subject them to the will of one man.

Should a similar dictatorship rise today, seeking to make complete use of all technical means in a perfect manner for the domination of global populations, it is very likely they would pursue similar methods - not over radio waves - but by dominating the 21st century's primary means of communication - the Internet.

Facebook Zero - the Modern-Day "People's Receiver"

Facebook Zero is a service provided by Facebook in cooperation with mobile phone services worldwide. It is essentially the ability to use Facebook over cellular phone networks without being charged. It is part of a wider scheme called "zero-rating," which telecom giants are using to selectively provide content for its users.

It represents the complete circumvention of the concept of net neutrality in which all information traveling across the Internet is treated equally. Net neutrality has become the front line in today's battle for and against "independent thought," just as Germany controlling the radio waves within its borders represented a similar battle during the 1930's and 1940's.

How effective is Facebook's technical control over independent thought?

News outlet Quartz in a February 2015 article titled, "Millions of Facebook users have no idea they're using the internet," revealed that (emphasis added):

Indonesians surveyed by Galpaya told her that they didn't use the internet. But in focus groups, they would talk enthusiastically about how much time they spent on Facebook. Galpaya, a researcher (and now CEO) with LIRNEasia, a think tank, called Rohan Samarajiva, her boss at the time, to tell him what she had discovered. "It seemed that in their minds, the Internet did not exist; only Facebook," he concluded.

The article reveals that the same trend can be seen beyond Indonesia, across Southeast Asia, Africa, and other regions targeted by Facebook Zero's scheme. The article also reveals the obvious fact that surveys and research indicate the reality of Facebook Zero contradicts the stated goals of Facebook.

The article would claim (emphasis added):

Since at least 2013, Facebook has been making noises about connecting the entire world to the internet. But even Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook's operations head, admits that there are Facebook users who don't know they're on the internet. So is Facebook succeeding in its goal if the people it is connecting have no idea they are using the internet? And what does it mean if masses of first-time adopters come online not via the open web, but the closed, proprietary network where they must play by Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg's rules?

Quartz' article would explain - in depth - how services are moving away from websites and toward Facebook - which becomes a problem specifically because of "Zuckerberg's rules."

The Modern Day Destruction of Independent Thought

Facebook is more than just a social media network. When it was first conceived, users were free to follow others as they wished, and would see posts of those they followed in real-time. By 2014, however, Facebook had begun tampering with how users viewed content from other users they followed.

A user's "News Feed" was now being regulated not by the user, but by algorithms created by Facebook. Content providers found their reach to their audiences plummet - and unless they were willing to pay to reach more users, it would remain that way.

Facebook would attempt to justify this new move in a section on its website called, "Organic Reach on Facebook: Your Questions Answered," where it claims:

Rather than showing people all possible content, News Feed is designed to show each person on Facebook the content that's most relevant to them. Of the 1,500+ stories a person might see whenever they log onto Facebook, News Feed displays approximately 300. To choose which stories to show, News Feed ranks each possible story (from more to less important) by looking at thousands of factors relative to each person.

In reality, these "factors" may or may not have anything to do with what is relative to "each person." And with Facebook's growing involvement under the US State Department, manipulating political systems worldwide, and its recent pledge to join the war on "fake news," it is likely these factors will be more related to what special interests feel Facebook should make relevant, than the actual individuals viewing their own News Feed.

In other words, Facebook has constructed a modern day People's Receiver for corporate-financier special interests - with alternatives omitted from the tuning dials, and lacking the technical ability to receive alternative information from outside Facebook's carefully controlled information space. It is the modern day destruction of independent thought - an information cage many - like the German people during the 1930-40's may not even realize they're locked in.

Just as people fought hard to up end the Nazi propaganda machine during World War II, people today are and must continue to confront, undermine, and eventually displace Facebook's monopoly over modern day communication. Unlike Nazi Germany's People's Receivers, Facebook doesn't taint and skew the perception of just 80 million Germans, but includes a user base spread out across the planet and numbering nearly 2 billion.