

## FACEBOOK'S TWO DECADES: TRAVERSING THE SPECTRUM FROM VIRTUAL COMMUNALISM TO ALLEGED REALITY CENSORSHIP: LITERATURE REVIEW

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### Abstract

This comprehensive literature review embarks on a nuanced odyssey through the multifaceted evolution of Facebook spanning two decades, transmuting from a bastion of virtual communalism to grappling with intricate allegations of reality censorship. The narrative unfurls by critically traversing key phases, unraveling the platform's embryonic role as a crucible for virtual community-building, and meticulously dissecting the labyrinthine shifts in user dynamics. The analysis intricately probes the elusive realm of alleged censorship practices, scrutinizing their rippling repercussions on a kaleidoscopic spectrum of perspectives. Furthermore, the review delves into the intricacies of privacy violations, peeling back the layers to unveil their far-reaching consequences and offering profound insights into the multidimensional challenges that have intricately sculpted Facebook's tumultuous journey. Like a scholarly artisan, the methodology meticulously dissects an extensive corpus of academic articles, presenting a sophisticated and exhaustive understanding of Facebook's intricate dance within the ever-evolving and enigmatic digital landscape.

**Keywords:** Facebook, social media, virtual communalism, reality censorship, literature review, user dynamics, privacy violations.

### Introduction

In scrutinizing the phenomenon that spans two decades, this literature review centers on Facebook as the primary subject of analysis. As Facebook commemorates its 20th anniversary, its journey becomes pivotal for examination within digital history and

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evolution. Originating in 2004, the historical trajectory of Facebook covers significant periods in the development of social media, initiated by Mark Zuckerberg and his peers as a platform for information exchange and social connectivity (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Understanding how Facebook has evolved from facilitating personal connections to becoming a vessel for diverse perspectives is essential (Boyd & Ellison, 2010).

This literature review goes beyond documenting Facebook's history; it aims to explore implications and impacts on users, tracing shifts from a virtual communal builder to alleged dissatisfaction associated with reality censorship. Additionally, it initiates a discourse on how Facebook provides insights into changing social and political dynamics in the contemporary era (Tufekci, 2014; Marwick & Lewis, 2017). By analyzing related literature, this study seeks a deeper understanding of Facebook's evolution and its impacts on users, guiding considerations of the role of social media in modern life (Sunstein, 2018).

The study's structure comprehensively explores various dimensions of Facebook, engaging with aspects of history, social development, and politics surrounding the platform. The analysis of Facebook's history is a foundation for understanding its increasing complexity, exploring the shift from early optimism to alleged dissatisfaction due to reality censorship (Castells, 2013). Critical aspects related to reality censorship and changes in Facebook's privacy policies that impact users are involved, along with exploration into how diverse perspectives are met with censorship and its implications for the digital community (Van Dijck et al., 2019; Napoli, 2011).

To present a holistic understanding, this literature review integrates academic perspectives, opinions, and research findings related to Facebook (Boyd, 2010). It serves as a reference source contributing to a broader understanding of the role and impact of social media in transforming digital communication and social dynamics in the contemporary era (Diakopoulos, 2016). Delving into its historical context is imperative to comprehend Facebook's evolution from an exclusive student networking platform to a global social networking giant (Gillespie, 2018).

In its early years, Facebook was hailed as a revolutionary force fostering connections and enabling the sharing of diverse perspectives (Couldry & Hepp, 2018). However, challenges emerged with the platform's expansion, including concerns about the commodification of personal data and the ethical implications of data-driven decision-making (Fuchs, 2014). The literature discusses critical turning points, such as the alleged censorship of content and perspectives on Facebook, raising questions about freedom of expression, and the role of social media platforms in content curation (Boyd & Crawford, 2012).

The overarching objective of this literature review is to comprehensively explore Facebook's historical trajectory from its inception in 2004 to its 20th anniversary in 2024. The study aims to unravel the platform's evolution, transitioning from a virtual communal space fostering global connections to a subject of alleged reality censorship

(Napoli, 2011). It endeavors to dissect the dynamics of user experiences, shedding light on alterations in user interactions, privacy concerns, and the ramifications of algorithmic adjustments on content dissemination (Bruns & Burgess, 2015).

In exploring the optimism to dissatisfaction transition, the study seeks to understand the factors contributing to this perceptual shift, investigating Facebook's role as a virtual communal space facilitating connections, conversations, and the formation of digital communities across diverse demographics (Boyd, 2010). The study delves into the gravity of reality censorship concerns, critically assessing instances where specific perspectives are purportedly suppressed and evaluating the broader implications of such actions on freedom of expression (Gillespie, 2018).

Another pivotal objective is to examine Facebook's impact on user privacy, scrutinizing mechanisms and policies contributing to perceived privacy infringements (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). The study explores how Facebook, as a global digital phenomenon, reflects and influences contemporary social and political dynamics, addressing ethical considerations associated with content moderation (Van Dijk & Hacker, 2018). By contributing to broader conversations and debates, the platform becomes a focal point for the study to unravel its role in shaping modern communication, fostering communities, and addressing ethical considerations associated with content moderation (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

These objectives collectively aspire to provide a meticulous and comprehensive perspective on the multifaceted nature of Facebook's journey, addressing challenges and implications for users, communities, and the evolving digital landscape (Boyd & Ellison, 2010). Through an in-depth exploration of historical narratives, user experiences, and emerging concerns, this study seeks to unravel Facebook's pivotal role in the socio-digital milieu, fostering critical discourse on its transformative impact and future trajectories (Tufekci, 2014).

In conclusion, this literature review embarks on a comprehensive exploration of Facebook's historical journey, ranging from its optimistic beginnings to its complexities and concerns in its 20th year (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). By analyzing shifts in user experience, the emergence of reality censorship, and broader societal implications, this study contributes to a nuanced understanding of Facebook's multifaceted role in shaping the digital landscape (Boyd & Ellison, 2010). It also sheds light on the challenges and opportunities for social media platforms to foster genuine virtual communities while addressing contemporary concerns (Tufekci, 2014).

## **Methodology**

The methodological framework employed in this exhaustive literature review initiates with a thorough identification of pertinent sources, encompassing various dimensions of Facebook's evolution, including historical development, user experiences, reality censorship concerns, and privacy implications (Booth et al., 2008;

Ridley, 2008). Rigorous searches span esteemed scholarly databases like PubMed, JSTOR, and Google Scholar, aiming to curate a diverse and scholarly collection of peer-reviewed articles, research papers, and credible sources in alignment with the study's specific objectives (Webster & Watson, 2002).

A set of well-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria is established to ensure the incorporation of rigorous academic contributions while excluding sources lacking relevance (Fink, 2019). This meticulous approach guarantees that the chosen literature aligns closely with the study's predefined goals, enhancing the overall quality of the review (Tranfield et al., 2003).

The subsequent phase involves a detailed extraction of relevant information, emphasizing synthesizing critical themes derived from the literature (Cooper, 1998). This synthesis process constructs a coherent narrative capturing the multifaceted aspects of Facebook's journey from 2004 to 2024. A chronological analysis is then employed to trace the platform's historical development, delving into significant events, feature modifications, and shifts in user dynamics over distinct periods (Petticrew & Roberts, 2008). Simultaneously, a comparative analysis discerns evolving patterns in user experiences, encompassing changes in user interactions, privacy concerns, and the influence of algorithmic modifications on content dissemination (Grant & Booth, 2009).

Thematic analysis is a critical component, directing attention to literature related to reality censorship and privacy implications (Baumeister & Leary, 1997). This approach uncovers key themes, sub-themes, and patterns associated with alleged censorship and privacy concerns on Facebook, facilitating a nuanced understanding of the challenges and implications in these domains. Furthermore, a critical discourse analysis explores Facebook's role in contemporary social and political dynamics, dissecting language use, power relations, and underlying ideologies embedded in the literature (Green et al., 2006).

Ethical considerations remain paramount throughout the methodology, ensuring the utilization of reputable sources, adherence to academic integrity, and transparent reporting of findings. The Privacy of individuals discussed in the literature is respected, and potential biases are acknowledged and addressed to maintain ethical standards (Booth et al., 2008). The study conscientiously acknowledges potential limitations, such as data availability and the dynamic nature of social media platforms. Delimitations, including a focus on English-language literature, are explicitly outlined to provide transparency about the scope and constraints of the study.

In conclusion, the methodology concludes with synthesizing and interpreting the extracted information, providing a comprehensive understanding of Facebook's journey and its multifaceted role in the contemporary digital landscape. The references provided, including works by Booth et al., Ridley, Webster and Watson, Fink, Tranfield, et al., Cooper, Baumeister and Leary, Grant and Booth, Green et al., and Petticrew and

Roberts, contribute foundational insights and methodological guidance to the comprehensive literature review.

## Findings

### Early Development of Facebook as Virtual Communalism

In its nascent phase, Facebook assumed a pivotal role in the landscape of virtual communalism (Soon, 2017). The year 2007 marked a significant juncture where the platform not only facilitated the preservation of personal relationships cultivated since its inception in 2004 but also contributed to the broader communal ethos (Soon, 2017). During this early period, Facebook served as more than a medium for interaction; it played a crucial role in fostering a sense of community among its users.

This era witnessed users, including the author, engaging in the process of reconnecting with old acquaintances from school and friends met during travels, such as those in Lebanon following the 2006 Israeli assault (Soon, 2017). The emphasis was initially placed on nurturing personal relationships, laying the groundwork for the subsequent development of a more expansive and interconnected community within the Facebook platform.

Moreover, Facebook's trajectory extended beyond the realm of preserving individual connections. It became instrumental in facilitating the construction of communities founded on shared interests and political ideologies (Soon, 2017). Academics, writers, and activists aligned with similar political inclinations began forming interconnected networks within the Facebook landscape. This transformative phase positioned the platform as a virtual space for personal connections and an inspirational forum, fostering the exchange of ideas and meaningful dialogues among users (Soon, 2017).

**Table 1: Role of Facebook in the Early Stage (2007) as Virtual Communalism**

Aspect	Description
Formation of Personal Relationships	Facebook was used to maintain personal relationships established since 2004, including acquaintances from the journey in Lebanon.
Development of Community	The platform became a space for developing a broader community populated by academics, writers, and activists with similar political tendencies.
Inspirational Forum	At this stage, Facebook was considered an inspirational forum, facilitating the exchange of ideas and substantial dialogue, creating a positive atmosphere of virtual communalism.

Created, 2024

### Metamorphosis from Optimism to Dissatisfaction

The evolution of Facebook has undergone a discernible transformation, shifting from initial optimism to a prevailing dissatisfaction with the platform's changing dynamics.

In its early stages, Facebook played a crucial role in shaping virtual communalism (Borowik, "From Radical Communalism to Virtual Community," 2018). Initially focused on personal relationships, the platform evolved into a broader network where friendships expanded beyond individual circles, fundamentally altering the character of user interactions. As time progressed, user narratives, including those of the author, experienced significant changes amidst their journey on Facebook. Concerns such as Privacy and control over content took center stage, contributing to a growing dissatisfaction with the platform's intricate evolution (Taplin, "Move Fast and Break Things," 2017). These shifts reflected an evolving landscape where user priorities and apprehensions evolved.

The discernible gap between Facebook's initial promises as an inspirational forum and the current reality became increasingly apparent. User experiences did not consistently align with the platform's initial pledges, leading to dissatisfaction and perceived constraints (Candón-Mena & Montero Sánchez, "From Cyber-Activism to Technopolitics," 2021). This disparity underscored the inherent complexities in the platform's development and user experience.

Table 2: **Metamorphosis from Optimism to Dissatisfaction**

Aspect	Description
Transition to a Broader Network	There was a shift from a focus on personal relationships to a broader network, changing the dynamics of user interaction.
Development of Narratives Over Time	User narratives, including the author's, changed over time, particularly concerning Privacy and content control.
Discrepancy Between Promises and Reality	The disparity between the initial expectations of Facebook as an inspirational forum and the current reality led to dissatisfaction.

Created, 2024

### Diversity of Perspectives and Allegations of Censorship on Facebook

As Facebook evolved, a pivotal aspect emerged: the diversification of user perspectives and the simultaneous rise of allegations surrounding censorship.

One of the discernible changes in Facebook's trajectory was the expansion of users' social circles. This transformation reflected a broader engagement with diverse perspectives, reshaping the platform into a melting pot of opinions (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Bruns & Burgess, 2015)—individuals connected with various contacts, fostering a rich and varied discourse within the Facebook community. Alongside the expansion of social circles, there surfaced allegations of censorship targeting perspectives

considered valuable or those challenging the status quo (Sunstein, 2018; Gillespie, 2018). Users voiced concerns about the perceived suppression of dissenting opinions, introducing tension between the platform's proclaimed commitment to inclusivity and the perceived limitations imposed on valuable perspectives.

This period marked a distinctive misalignment between Facebook's potential as an inclusive community and the perceived constraints on diverse viewpoints (Boyd, 2010; Van Dijck et al., 2019). Initially conceived as a space for open dialogue, the platform faced scrutiny for potential limitations on freely exchanging ideas. The tension between Facebook's envisioned role as an inclusive community and the allegations of censorship brought to the forefront critical questions about the platform's commitment to fostering a genuinely open and diverse digital space.

**Table 3: Diversity of Perspectives and Allegations of Censorship**

Aspect	Description
Expansion of Users' Social Circles	The platform experienced an increase in the diversity of users' social circles, fostering a richer exchange of diverse perspectives.
Allegations of Censorship	Allegations emerged regarding censoring valuable perspectives, leading to concerns about suppressing dissenting opinions.
Misalignment with Potential for Inclusivity	A notable misalignment surfaced between Facebook's potential as an inclusive community and perceived constraints on diverse viewpoints.

Created, 2024

### **Deeper Understanding of Allegations of Censorship**

In the meticulous examination of the allegations surrounding censorship on Facebook, a more profound understanding emerges, illuminating nuanced aspects of this intricate issue.

One noteworthy aspect pertains to the scarcity of specific examples within articles, contributing to challenges in comprehending the extent and nature of alleged censorship on the platform (Tufekci, 2014; Couldry & Hepp, 2018). The absence of concrete instances necessitates critically examining the broader context in which these allegations unfold. This need for more specificity underscores the importance of careful analysis and contextualization to grasp the intricacies of the alleged censorship landscape. A deeper exploration is imperative to fathom the nature and implications of the alleged censorship. Scrutinizing the mechanisms at play involves delving into the intricate dynamics of content moderation, user interactions, and the broader impact on the digital community (Gillespie, 2018; Boyd, 2010). Understanding the multifaceted dimensions of alleged censorship requires a comprehensive analysis of its potential

effects on user experience, content dissemination, and the overall dynamics of the Facebook platform.

A comprehensive understanding of allegations of censorship demands an exploration of the social and political context influencing these actions. The dynamics of censorship are deeply intertwined with the broader socio-political environment, shaping the decisions made by the platform and influencing user perceptions (Van Dijk & Hacker, 2018; Napoli, 2011). Examining the external factors that impact Facebook's content moderation practices unveils the intricate interplay between the platform, its users, and the larger social and political landscape. This contextualized approach is essential for unraveling the complexities of censorship allegations and their implications in the digital realm.

**Table 4: Deeper Understanding of Allegations of Censorship**

Aspect	Description
Lack of Specific Examples	The absence of specific examples in articles poses challenges in comprehending the extent and nature of alleged censorship.
Exploration of Nature and Implications	A deeper exploration is required to understand the mechanisms and implications of alleged censorship on user experience and content dissemination.
Social and Political Context Influencing Censorship	Understanding allegations of censorship involves exploring the broader social and political context influencing these actions.

Created, 2024

### Privacy Violations and Their Consequences

Exploring Facebook's trajectory unveils a critical concern that has garnered increasing attention: privacy violations and their consequential aftermath.

The articles cast a discerning spotlight on the emergence of privacy issues within the Facebook landscape. As users and analysts heighten their awareness of the paramount importance of Privacy, concerns begin to surface regarding potential compromises individuals on the platform face. This recognition initiates a broader discourse, delving into the delicate balance between users' aspirations for a personalized experience and the indispensable need to safeguard their private information. The evolving landscape of privacy issues on Facebook signifies a pivotal juncture where the digital realm intersects with individual rights and ethical considerations.

Despite acknowledging privacy issues, a notable gap persists in providing detailed information regarding the mechanisms and specific events that precipitated privacy violations (Diakopoulos, 2016; Boyd & Crawford, 2012). This need for more specificity poses a significant challenge, hindering the comprehensive understanding of the root causes and intricate processes through which privacy breaches transpired. An

elucidation of these mechanisms is imperative for informed discourse and crucial for formulating effective solutions and preventative measures. Empowering users with a deeper comprehension of the intricacies involved in privacy breaches is fundamental to fostering a resilient and vigilant digital community.

The consequences stemming from Facebook's privacy policies and practices emerge, illustrating their far-reaching impact on users (Napoli, 2011; Gillespie, 2018). The complex interplay between platform policies and user practices manifests implications for individual Privacy, profoundly influencing the overall user experience and the trust users place in the platform. Understanding these consequences becomes pivotal for users, policymakers, and Facebook alike. Navigating a path forward that prioritizes both innovation and robust user privacy protection necessitates a nuanced approach. This entails an ongoing dialogue, iterative policy refinement, and a commitment to transparency to balance technological advancement and safeguarding user privacy in the digital age.

**Table 5: Privacy Violations and Their Consequences**

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Description</b>
Introduction to Privacy Issues	The articles highlight the emergence of privacy concerns within Facebook, sparking a broader discourse on the balance of user experience and data protection.
Lack of Detailed Mechanisms and Events	The presence of specific information about the mechanisms and events leading to privacy violations helps a comprehensive understanding of root causes.
Impact of Facebook's Privacy Policies	The consequences of Facebook's privacy policies extend to influence individual Privacy, user experience, and overall trust in the platform.

Created, 2024

## **Discussion**

### **Navigating Facebook's Two-Decade Evolution**

Facebook's trajectory has undergone dynamic shifts over the past two decades, transitioning from its origins as a virtual communal space to facing scrutiny for alleged reality censorship (Shirky, 2008; Rheingold, 2007; Gladwell, 2006). This exploration critically examines pivotal aspects of Facebook's journey, including its early role, the challenges encountered, and the broader implications for the digital landscape. In its early years, Facebook was pivotal as a virtual communal space, fostering connections and nurturing a sense of community among users (Shirky, 2008; Rheingold, 2007). Initially attracted to personal connections, users actively contributed to forming diverse online communities. The platform's capacity to bridge geographical distances and unite individuals with shared interests underscored its potential as a virtual communal space (Gladwell, 2006).

Over time, Facebook witnessed notable shifts in user dynamics, evolving from a platform centered on personal connections to one where broader networks flourished (Rainie & Wellman, 2012; Boyd, 2014). The changing dynamics resulted in a more intricate interplay of personal relationships and a diverse array of connections, influencing the nature of content shared, user interactions, and the overall atmosphere on the platform (Lanier, 2011). A pivotal inflection point in Facebook's evolution has been the emergence of allegations related to reality censorship (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Users and observers voiced concerns about the platform's role in shaping and constraining narratives, potentially suppressing certain viewpoints. This discussion on reality censorship initiates a complex dialogue on the responsibility of social media platforms in content curation and its broader implications for information dissemination and societal discourse (Gross & Acquisti, 2005).

The challenges Facebook faces are multifaceted, with a prominent focus on perceived content censorship and growing privacy concerns (Shapiro & Varian, 1999; Carr, 2020). As Facebook expanded in influence, questions arose regarding its role in controlling information flow and its potential impact on diverse perspectives. Simultaneously, privacy concerns gained prominence, with users questioning the platform's data practices and how personal information is safeguarded (Cropf, 2008). Algorithmic modifications significantly shaped user experiences on Facebook, inadvertently contributing to the formation of echo chambers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Rainie & Wellman, 2012). The platform's algorithms, designed for content curation based on user preferences, unintentionally limited the diversity of perspectives encountered. This raises questions about the delicate balance between personalization and the inadvertent creation of information silos.

Privacy violations emerged as a focal point in Facebook's narrative, with incidents highlighting vulnerabilities in the platform's data protection measures (Gross & Acquisti, 2005). Despite acknowledging privacy issues, a substantial gap exists in providing detailed information concerning the mechanisms and specific events that precipitated privacy violations. These mechanisms must be elucidated to comprehensively understand the root causes and intricate processes through which privacy breaches transpired. The evolution of Facebook raises ethical considerations regarding the platform's responsibility to safeguard user privacy, ensure content diversity, and address allegations of reality censorship (Cropf, 2008; Carr, 2020). Ethical frameworks within which social media platforms operate come under scrutiny, prompting discussions about the need for transparent policies, user empowerment, and adherence to ethical standards in the digital realm (Benkler, 2006).

Facebook's trajectory carries implications for the broader digital landscape, influencing how other platforms approach content moderation, user privacy, and the balance between personalization and diverse content dissemination (Shirky, 2008; Rainie & Wellman, 2012). The outcomes of Facebook's journey have ripple effects,

prompting discussions on the ethical responsibilities of social media. The discussions sparked by Facebook's evolution catalyze broader reflections on the evolving nature of social media in the 21st century (Carr, 2020). In conclusion, Facebook's two-decade evolution reflects a dynamic interplay of communalism, challenges, and complexities in navigating a global digital stage (Taplin, 2017). The platform's role as a virtual communal space has transformed, giving rise to intricate user dynamics and raising critical questions about censorship, Privacy, and ethical considerations. As we navigate the implications of Facebook's journey, future research should delve deeper into the long-term societal impacts, ethical frameworks for digital platforms, and strategies for fostering a more inclusive and transparent digital landscape (Shapiro & Varian, 1999; Rheingold, 2007). The discussions sparked by Facebook's evolution catalyze broader reflections on the evolving nature of social media in the 21st century (Lanier, 2011).

### **Conclusion**

Observing Facebook's two-decade journey provides a profound understanding of its evolution. This reflection highlights the complex evolution and dynamics shaping Facebook's identity, from its early role as a virtual communal space to allegations of reality censorship. Significant changes and challenges Facebook faces raise profound questions about its role in defining the digital space. The transformation from virtual communalism to censorship and Privacy issues underscores the complexity of evolving social and technological dynamics. This conclusion lays the groundwork for further reflection and exploration in future research. Identifying critical changes and posing ethical questions regarding Privacy and censorship is a gateway for further research.

Thus, a deep understanding of Facebook's evolution encapsulates its history and prompts critical reflection on the social and ethical implications inherent in these dynamic changes. Further research can provide deeper insights into long-term impacts and contribute to a more holistic understanding of the platform's role on the global digital stage.

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