

## FACEBOOK AS A MOM'S MEDIUM

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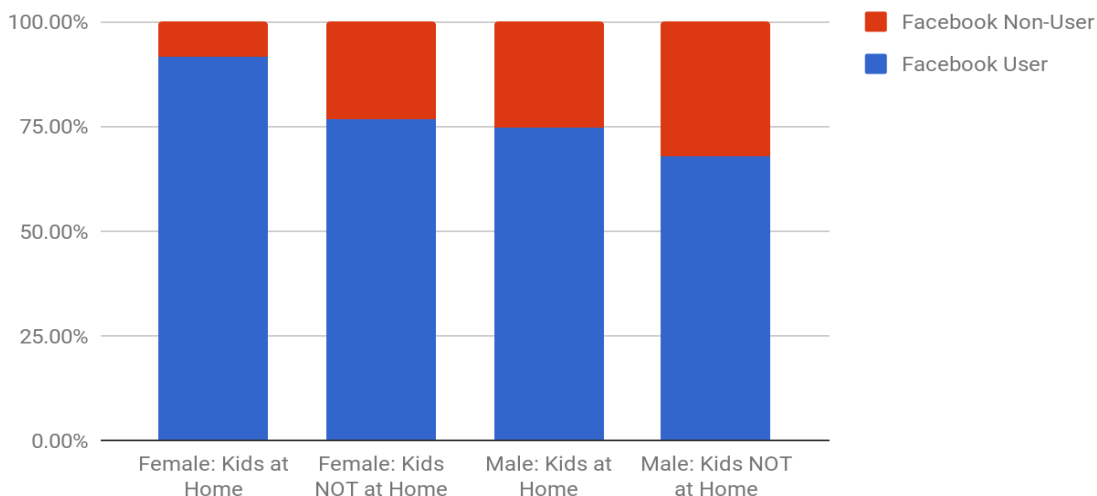
Computing is becoming more and more a public utility. Yet, better predictive software and cheaper computing power will soon turn the applications running on top of this utility into a universal and free service. At the forefront of this shift is the emergence of universal digital sociability as a type of global, almost free entitlement. The plethora of free social media, which do not cease to outcompete each other, has created a new type of public good, similar to the air we breathe and the language we use: a sine-qua-non condition of being human which no-one can control or declare his or her own. At the same time, online sociability is rooted in certain companies with certain rights, which entitle them to commercial exploitation and intellectual rights. Much of our current conversation about the role social media plays in social surveillance, political interference or about the newly discovered human right to be forgotten by search engines emerges at the intersection of these two things: universal online sociability seen as a public good and the private ownership of the platforms that provide this good. On the one hand, we demand and want to keep a free flowing social media environment that could and should serve our every need and whim. On the other hand, we demand and want the companies that make these needs and whims possible to limit what they can or should do. The answers to this dilemma have many times taken the form of activism, urging users to abandon social media, as the recent case of the #DeleteFacebook campaign, launched as a backlash against Facebook in the aftermath of the recent Cambridge Analytica scandal. The movement, though it targets the particular social network platform, articulates the public outrage against the exploitation of their needs in the course of political and financial gain.

However, we should ask ourselves one question: Is “deleting your account” on your preferred social network (and we are not talking about Facebook only, but since it is the undisputed social network leader, let us keep this as our use case), the easy solution? A recent experiment by Tromholt Morten from the University of Copenhagen published in *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, found that people who gave up Facebook for a week were for that period less lonely and depressed than those who did not. Even if the experiment was for a limited period, let us, for the sake of argument assume that in the long term abandoning social networks is the answer to a happier and more

fulfilling life. The question now, is if this is possible. We fear not, or at least it is not easy, and certainly, may create more problems than it solves. And the reason for this, is simple: social media has become a “mom’s medium” and you cannot meddle with the moms without turning the world upside down.

What we mean to say by this is that the needs (mostly) and the whims (fewer and fewer, at least by specific weight compared to the mass of needs) are those of ordinary, hard working, essential members of society: the mothers that weave and keep together the fabric of society. According to the Pew Internet 2016 study on social media, women between 24-55 are the single largest user group on Facebook, representing 29% of Facebook users. Of these, half are moms. More important, being a mom with kids at home is a very strong predictor for being a Facebook user. A staggering 92% of women over 27, the average age for having the first baby, with kids at home are Facebook users. A much lower proportion of men over 27 with kids at home, 75%, are likely to be Facebook users. In fact, men with kids at home are barely catching up with women without kids at home in terms of using Facebook.

### Sex, home parenting, and Facebook use: Moms over 27 are more likely to be Facebook users than dads of same ages



Make no mistake, we are not using the term “mom” as stereotype of some sort. We are not talking about some moms whose vocation is to be moms at the expense of being career professionals. We are talking about ALL moms, working or not, older or younger, married or not, Asian, African, European, Indian, or what not. These hundreds of millions of moms, whose many needs and interests span from highly specialized professional skills to keeping track of their son’s swimming times at the latest practice, are busy people. Such people need to prioritize. They also need to save time. For them, social media is an essential productivity tool. Social media is the one-stop-shopping experience for tracking the latest conversation with their professional colleagues, for checking the latest news from the school principal, for checking on their spouses level of compliance with the latest family chores, and for spending the minute or two left on the latest news or chatting session with their high school buddies. Thus, when we talk about regulating or controlling or limiting or maybe even sending back where it came from what appear to be the unbridled social media, a question that remains to be answered is: what will the moms have to say about it? How will their lives and by this the general level of productivity and the specific

level of domestic peace in each home will be affected by limiting or controlling what the moms can or cannot do online to make their lives easier?

So, what does this mean? That we have to passively endure the violation of privacy in the course of profit and political power? Well, the answer may come from the EU, with the new General Data Protection Regulation (or GDPR in brief), being in effect as of May 25, 2018, according to which companies will have to simplify terms and conditions with simple-to-digest consent requests, allowing end users to withdraw consent as easily as it is now to give it. Stricter rules regarding the use of personal data will apply for all EU citizen data, for which process personal data now has to be “unambiguous” and for “specific” purposes. This might have far reaching effects, including in the US. While not a perfect solution, since more control might involve both more bureaucracy and storage of data for compliance purposes, it is an opportunity to set some rules over our online socialization, in the course of respect for personal privacy, in the same way we do in all other (non online) social activities. After all, isn’t this what your mom told you? So, I think that even when it comes to social networks, one thing is sure: Before doing anything, ask mom.