

Facebook is now 20 years' old

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Online Desk: Facebook, a ubiquitous part of most of our online lives, has just reached the remarkable milestone of two decades. Originally launched as 'TheFacebook' on February 4, 2004, by Mark Zuckerberg and his college roommates at Harvard University, namely Andrew McCollum, Eduardo Saverin, Chris Hughes, and Dustin Moskovitz, the platform has come a long way in defining social media platforms in these 20 years.

Let's take a quick look at how Facebook came to be and how it has impacted the internet as we know it.

The birth of a new social media platform

In 2004, Mark Zuckerberg, inspired by the idea of creating a centralised website, launched 'TheFacebook' with the initial goal of connecting Harvard University students. Partnering with investor and entrepreneur Eduardo Saverin, the duo invested \$1,000 each in the project. Within 24 hours of its launch, the site garnered 1,200 to 1,500 registrants.

However, controversy arose as three seniors accused Zuckerberg of using their concept for HarvardConnection.com to build a competing product. Despite legal challenges, the platform rapidly expanded beyond Harvard, reaching Stanford, Columbia, and Yale by March 2004.

By the summer of that year, Facebook was incorporated, with entrepreneur Sean Parker becoming its president, and its base of operations moved to Palo Alto, California. The platform's growth continued, gradually including universities across the United States and Canada.

Gradual expansion

In 2005, Facebook acquired the domain facebook.com for \$200,000, prompting the removal of 'The' from its name. The platform expanded its user base significantly, making it available to high school students in 2006 and subsequently opening to the general public. By December 2005, Facebook boasted 6 million monthly active users, a number that skyrocketed to 2.989 billion by April 2023.

By February 2011, Facebook had become the largest online photo host, expecting to reach 100 billion photos by the summer of that year. Additionally, in October 2011, over 350 million users accessed Facebook via mobile phones, constituting 33% of the platform's total traffic.

Over the years, Facebook has undergone significant transformations, introducing a myriad of features that have redefined how we interact online. The introduction of the News Feed in 2006 marked a pivotal moment, aggregating updates from friends into a centralised stream. Subsequent additions, such as the Like button, status updates, photo sharing, and later video content, have contributed to Facebook's status as a comprehensive social hub.

Impact on social interaction

Facebook's influence extends beyond being a mere social networking site; it wouldn't be farfetched to say that it has altered the dynamics of human interaction.

The platform has facilitated the reconnection of long-lost friends, allowed families separated by distance to stay connected, and provided a stage for individuals to express themselves on a global scale. It isn't a stretch to say that Facebook has become an integral part of the daily lives of billions, influencing communication, relationships, and even the way news is disseminated.

As Facebook's user base grew exponentially, so did its impact on society. The platform played a significant role in political movements, acting as a catalyst for social and political change. However, it has also faced criticism for its role in spreading misinformation and contributing to the polarisation of public discourse, prompting debates on the responsibility of tech companies in shaping public opinion.

Looking ahead

Despite its success, Facebook has weathered its fair share of controversies. Issues surrounding user privacy, data breaches, and concerns about the platform's role in spreading misinformation have led to increased scrutiny and regulatory challenges. Mark Zuckerberg's appearances before Congress and ongoing debates about the responsibility of tech giants highlight the evolving landscape of online governance.

As Facebook enters its third decade, it faces new challenges and opportunities. The platform's journey from a college dorm room project to a global social media giant is a testament to the transformative power of technology. As we celebrate its milestone, it is essential to reflect on the positive contributions while remaining vigilant about the challenges posed by such influential platforms in the digital age. Facebook's impact on the internet is undeniable, and its future evolution will undoubtedly shape the way we experience online interactions for years to come.