# Joe Rogan highlights Facebook’s secret 2012 experiment manipulating users’ emotions without consent



Joe Rogan expressed his astonishment on the *Joe Rogan Experience* podcast upon learning about a controversial experiment conducted by Facebook in 2012, which allegedly manipulated the emotions of nearly 700,000 users without their knowledge. Rebecca Lemov, a historian of science and authority on mind control from Harvard University, revealed that the social media giant had altered the news feeds of these users, either infusing them with overwhelmingly positive or negative content to study the ensuing emotional responses.

Facebook claims that the objective of this secretive endeavour was to fine-tune users' content exposure, ensuring that what they viewed was as "relevant and engaging" as possible. However, Lemov painted a far more sinister picture, likening the experiment's emotional manipulation to the tactics employed by cults that reshape members’ perceptions through selective exposure to collective sentiments. According to her, the experiment did not merely influence thoughts but altered feelings that users held about those thoughts. This revelation raises profound ethical questions: if individuals theoretically consent to such emotional experimentation upon joining the platform, does it exonerate Facebook from moral scrutiny?

The study's methodology involved meticulously adjusting algorithms to favour emotionally charged posts. This manipulation led to findings suggesting that users exposed to more positive content subsequently shared more uplifting updates, while those receiving predominantly negative posts reflected similarly bleak emotions in their own interactions. Alarmingly, amidst this emotional experimentation, at least one user publicly admitted to experiencing suicidal thoughts during this timeframe, declaring that the negative curation of their news feed played a role in their mental distress.

The fallout from the experiment triggered an intense public outcry upon its disclosure in 2014, sparking substantial debate regarding ethical considerations in digital research. Despite the waves of backlash, including inquiries from the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC) and investigations by several data protection authorities—including the UK's Information Commissioner's Office—no significant legal repercussions followed. The consensus ultimately deemed the manipulations as incidental to the outlined terms of service that ensured users consented to data manipulation upon account registration.

Concerns regarding digital manipulation extend beyond Facebook. Rogan referenced research by Robert Epstein, another guest on his podcast, who examined how search engine results can influence public opinion, particularly during politically charged periods like the 2016 presidential election. Epstein's findings indicated that search algorithms could subtly sway undecided voters by favouring certain narratives while suppressing others. This manipulation of access to information shares the same ethical dilemmas unearthed in the Facebook experiment, where the pursuit of user engagement could easily transition into a form of psychological influence.

While Facebook has defended its actions by arguing that ethical boundaries are respected in data use, the firm’s scrutiny highlights a burgeoning concern surrounding the unchecked power of social media platforms in shaping public perception and emotion. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, it remains crucial for both users and regulators to engage in dialogues about consent, transparency, and ethical stewardship in the realm of online interactions.

Mind control expert Rebecca Lemov summarized the sentiment perfectly when she noted that “whenever people have power, unchecked power, and insane influence… you could get away with so much.” This reflection resonates profoundly in the contemporary context of digital media, where the line between ethical research and manipulation appears increasingly blurred.

The broad implication of these findings is that in an age dominated by social media, our vulnerabilities can be exploited either for commercial gain or as instruments in unnoticed experiments. Thus, the critical question remains: how can users navigate these platforms responsibly, ensuring they are not unwitting participants in an unregulated social experiment?

### Reference Map

1. [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-14728883/Joe-Rogan-sinister-experiment-mind-control.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
2. [[2]](https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-28051930)
3. [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/jun/29/facebook-users-emotions-news-feeds)
4. [[4]](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/07/01/9-answers-about-facebooks-creepy-emotional-manipulation-experiment/)
5. [[5]](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/researcher-apologizes-for-facebook-study-in-emotional-manipulation/)
6. [[6]](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-06-30/facebooks-emotional-manipulation-test-was-unethical-and-so-is-the-rest-of-social-media)
7. [[7]](https://time.com/2949137/facebook-news-feed-experiment-europe/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-14728883/Joe-Rogan-sinister-experiment-mind-control.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-28051930> - In 2012, Facebook conducted a psychology experiment on nearly 700,000 users without their knowledge, manipulating news feeds to control exposure to emotional content. The study aimed to gauge if exposure to emotions led people to change their own posting behaviors. Facebook stated there was no unnecessary collection of people's data and that none of the data used was associated with a specific person's Facebook account. The research was done in collaboration with Cornell University and the University of California at San Francisco. The experiment sparked criticism over the ethics of manipulating users' emotions without consent.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/jun/29/facebook-users-emotions-news-feeds> - Facebook revealed a secret experiment in which it manipulated the news feeds of 689,000 users to influence their emotions. The study, conducted in collaboration with Cornell University and the University of California at San Francisco, found that emotions expressed by friends via online social networks influence our own moods, constituting experimental evidence for massive-scale emotional contagion via social networks. The revelation led to criticism and calls for investigations into the ethics of such experiments without user consent.
4. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/07/01/9-answers-about-facebooks-creepy-emotional-manipulation-experiment/> - In 2012, Facebook conducted an experiment on nearly 700,000 users by adjusting their newsfeeds to show more positive or negative posts to study the impact on users' emotions. The method sparked outrage comparable to how users would react if major media outlets like The New York Times or ABC News had done something similar, highlighting concerns about mind manipulation and ethics. A researcher from Facebook issued an apology for the anxiety caused by the study's publication, but the company maintained that such experiments are covered under user agreements.
5. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/researcher-apologizes-for-facebook-study-in-emotional-manipulation/> - A Facebook data scientist apologized for a study that angered many Facebook users by trying to manipulate their emotions based on the posts they saw in their News Feeds. In the study, published in March in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, the researchers changed the algorithms on News Feeds of almost 700,000 Facebook users for one week in January 2012, to see whether a mostly positive or mostly negative News Feed would elicit different types of status updates. The study concluded that emotions expressed by others on Facebook influence our own emotions, constituting experimental evidence for massive-scale contagion via social networks.
6. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-06-30/facebooks-emotional-manipulation-test-was-unethical-and-so-is-the-rest-of-social-media> - Facebook's 2012 experiment, which subtly manipulated the emotional content in the news feeds of selected users, has been criticized for its ethical implications. The study aimed to determine how reactions change if Facebook users saw more happy posts or more negative ones, prompted by the concern that those who saw too many positive posts might feel bad about their own social lives. The researchers found the opposite was true. The experiment has raised legitimate questions about the ethics of Facebook’s actions, as scientists are not supposed to experiment on people without getting permission.
7. <https://time.com/2949137/facebook-news-feed-experiment-europe/> - Facebook has come under scrutiny from European data protection authorities after it revealed that it altered the news feeds of 689,000 users without informing them. The social media giant conducted this experiment to display specific emotional expressions, but its lack of transparency has caused outrage. Facebook claims that users consent to such research upon account creation. European privacy watchdogs, including Ireland's Office of the Data Protection Commissioner and Britain’s Information Commissioner’s Office, are investigating potential privacy law violations and have reached out to Facebook for a detailed response. The U.S. Federal Trade Commission has not yet indicated if it will investigate. Facebook maintains that the experiment had appropriate data protections and that it aims to improve feedback processes.