# Joe Rogan exposes Facebook’s covert 2012 experiment that manipulated users’ emotions



Joe Rogan's recent conversation with Rebecca Lemov, a historian of science and expert in mind control, shed light on the controversial 2012 Facebook experiment that sought to manipulate users' emotions without their consent. Lemov's insights revealed a deeply unsettling facet of social media—how platforms like Facebook can influence mental states through covert practices. The experiment, which altered the news feeds of nearly 700,000 users, aimed to investigate the phenomenon of emotional contagion, essentially testing whether exposure to positive or negative content could sway user emotions and behaviours.

According to Lemov, the experiment involved algorithms specifically designed to curate emotionally charged content for different user groups, leading to either increased positivity or negativity in their news feeds. “It’s not that it changed my thoughts,” Lemov elaborated, “it's that it changed my feelings about my thoughts.” This manipulation, she argues, resembles tactics often employed in cults, which seek to alter an individual's emotional landscape by immersing them in curated experiences.

This covert approach drew fierce backlash after it was publicly acknowledged in 2014. Critics labelled it a form of brainwashing, accusing Facebook of exploiting user vulnerabilities and failing to obtain informed consent. Despite the ethical concerns raised, Facebook maintained that users inadvertently agreed to such usage of their data upon signing up for the platform. In response to public outrage, Facebook updated its Data Use Policy four months after the study to include language suggesting that users consented to being part of research initiatives, a move that many regarded as a thinly veiled attempt to address ethical breaches retroactively.

The implications of this study echoed beyond individual experiences. Reports indicated that one user claimed the negative feed during this time contributed to suicidal thoughts, illustrating the potentially deadly repercussions of unchecked corporate influence over personal well-being. Additionally, the emotional impact of the study later caught the attention of government officials, prompting inquiries into whether Facebook had violated data protection laws. However, the U.S. Federal Trade Commission concluded that no direct legal action could be taken, as the experiment fell within the bounds of Facebook's terms of service.

As public discourse on the ethical ramifications of such corporate practices continues, the case has spurred calls for stricter regulations surrounding user research in social media. Activist groups, including the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC), filed complaints asserting that Facebook misrepresented its data usage policies in violating a previous FTC order, yet these actions did not escalate to significant legal consequences. In a broader context, as Lemov noted, the risks of unchecked corporate power extend beyond social media; they can influence societal moods and perceptions, underscoring a pervasive vulnerability across user experiences.

Rogan also pivoted the discussion to encompass other forms of manipulation prevalent in our digital age, referencing research by Robert Epstein that indicates internet search results can shape public opinion, particularly during sensitive political periods. For instance, during the 2016 presidential election, Rogan pointed out how biased search results could skew perceptions of candidates. Such findings serve as a reminder of the nuanced methods by which technology can subtly guide public sentiment.

In light of this ongoing manipulation, public trust in tech giants is understandably dwindling. Meta, Facebook’s parent company, recently announced a plan to eliminate its third-party fact-checking program, a decision met with skepticism and concerns about the spread of misinformation and censorship. Critics argue that the balance between free speech and the potential for harmful misinformation remains precariously tilted.

As the landscape of digital interaction evolves, the ethical framework governing research on user experiences must also adapt. The lessons from Facebook’s controversial experiment underscore an urgent need for dialogue about consent, transparency, and the moral obligations of companies wielding significant influence over public emotions and perceptions.

### Reference Map

1. Article [[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. Article [[2]](https://www.forbes.com/sites/kashmirhill/2014/06/30/facebook-only-got-permission-to-do-research-on-users-after-emotion-manipulation-study/)
3. Article [[3]](https://time.com/2949565/heres-what-facebook-can-do-with-your-personal-data-in-the-name-of-science/)
4. Article [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/jun/30/facebook-emotion-study-breached-ethical-guidelines-researchers-say)
5. Article [[5]](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1747016115579535)
6. Article [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/jul/02/facebook-apologises-psychological-experiments-on-users)
7. Article [[7]](https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-29475019)

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## 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.forbes.com/sites/kashmirhill/2014/06/30/facebook-only-got-permission-to-do-research-on-users-after-emotion-manipulation-study/> - In June 2014, Forbes reported that Facebook conducted an experiment manipulating users' emotions without their informed consent. The study, which involved altering the news feeds of nearly 700,000 users, aimed to understand emotional contagion on the platform. Critics argued that Facebook should have obtained explicit consent for such research. Four months after the study, Facebook updated its Data Use Policy to include 'research' as a permissible use of user data, raising questions about the adequacy of this retroactive consent.
3. <https://time.com/2949565/heres-what-facebook-can-do-with-your-personal-data-in-the-name-of-science/> - Time magazine highlighted the ethical concerns surrounding Facebook's 2012 experiment, where the company manipulated users' news feeds to study emotional contagion without their informed consent. The article discussed how Facebook's Data Use Policy, which users agree to upon signing up, was interpreted to permit such research. Privacy activists expressed worries about Facebook's extensive data collection and its potential to manipulate user experiences, emphasizing the need for clearer ethical guidelines in corporate research.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/jun/30/facebook-emotion-study-breached-ethical-guidelines-researchers-say> - The Guardian reported that researchers condemned Facebook's 2012 experiment for lacking informed consent, a breach of ethical guidelines for human subject research. The study, which manipulated the news feeds of nearly 700,000 users to test emotional contagion, was criticized for changing users' moods without their knowledge. Facebook's internal review practices were also scrutinized, with calls for better regulation of health and mood research using social networks.
5. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1747016115579535> - A 2016 study published in the journal 'Media, Culture & Society' analyzed Facebook's 2012 emotional contagion experiment, highlighting ethical flaws such as the lack of informed consent and potential harm to participants. The study called for better regulation of health and mood research using social networks, emphasizing the need for ethical standards in corporate research practices.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/jul/02/facebook-apologises-psychological-experiments-on-users> - In July 2014, Facebook's COO Sheryl Sandberg apologized for conducting secret psychological tests on nearly 700,000 users in 2012. The experiments, which manipulated users' news feeds to study emotional contagion, were criticized for being poorly communicated and lacking informed consent. Sandberg acknowledged the backlash and stated that the company should have communicated better about the research.
7. <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-29475019> - BBC News reported that Facebook admitted failings over its 2012 emotion manipulation study, stating it would change the way it conducts research on users. The company acknowledged being 'unprepared' for the backlash and recognized that it should have considered other non-experimental ways to conduct the research. Facebook also stated that it failed to communicate clearly about the study's purpose and methods.