# Joe Rogan exposes Facebook’s covert 2012 emotional manipulation experiment and its ethical fallout



Joe Rogan recently expressed his astonishment regarding a covert psychological experiment conducted by Facebook, which has drawn stark criticism for its potential impact on the mental health of thousands. In a recent episode of "The Joe Rogan Experience," he engaged with Harvard historian of science and mind control expert Rebecca Lemov, who detailed the alarming implications of a controversial 2012 study that manipulated the news feeds of nearly 700,000 users to measure the effects of emotional content.

This troubling research, executed by teams from Cornell University and the University of California, San Francisco, sought to explore emotional contagion, but the real motivation—enhancing user engagement—has drawn ire. Critics have condemned Facebook’s actions as akin to manipulative brainwashing, drawing parallels to techniques used by cults, and raising significant ethical concerns about user welfare and autonomy.

The fallout from this study has been dire. As Lemov highlighted, one participant reportedly experienced suicidal thoughts linked to the negative emotional content in their news feed. While Facebook argued it collected no identifiable data, the absence of informed consent invites grave ethical scrutiny. The findings starkly illustrated the influence of emotional content, suggesting that users exposed to positive posts engaged more positively, while those inundated with negativity descended into despair.

In response to the public backlash, the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC) lodged a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in 2014, asserting that Facebook's actions were a blatant breach of user consent principles established by a prior FTC order. Yet, without a formal lawsuit, the gravity of Facebook's actions seemed to slip through the cracks of accountability, shielded by the company's expansive terms of service.

Compounding these issues was the inquiry by the UK Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), which explored whether Facebook’s practices violated data protection laws. Despite the outcry and ethical concerns raised, the ICO concluded without imposing penalties, effectively allowing the tech giant to navigate the murky waters of consent with impunity.

Rogan expanded the discussion to the broader implications for public perception, noting claims that internet search engines could similarly sway political opinions. Citing research by Robert Epstein, he articulated how algorithm-driven search results could tilt undecided voters, particularly during pivotal electoral moments, such as the 2016 U.S. presidential election. This manipulation of information has alarming implications for democracy, raising questions about the moral responsibilities of tech companies in shaping public discourse.

The trend of emotional manipulation through digital means reveals pressing ethical dilemmas regarding consent and vulnerability. Lemov’s warnings reiterate that unchecked power dynamics pose substantial risks to users, a concern echoed by Rogan, who emphasized that manipulation can ensnare anyone in society.

As digital platforms increasingly dictate how information is disseminated, the implications of Facebook's controversial study serve as a stark reminder of the urgent need for stringent ethical standards in online practices. The intersecting domains of technology, ethical consent, and human psychology continue to be a crucial discourse as we navigate these perilous waters of influence—and beholden to no one, the ramifications could be dire for society at large, especially as the political landscape shifts under new leadership.

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 their 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 faced criticism for its ethical implications and lack of informed consent.
3. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/07/01/9-answers-about-facebooks-creepy-emotional-manipulation-experiment/> - In 2012, Facebook, in collaboration with Cornell University, conducted an experiment involving 698,003 users to study emotional contagion. Researchers adjusted users' news feeds to display more positive or negative content to observe changes in users' emotional states. The study found that exposure to more positive content led users to post more positive updates, while exposure to more negative content led to more negative posts. The experiment raised ethical concerns regarding informed consent and the manipulation of users' emotions without their knowledge.
4. <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, aimed to determine if exposure to emotional content affected users' own posting behaviors. The experiment faced criticism for its lack of transparency and ethical considerations, with activists and politicians calling it 'scandalous' and 'disturbing'.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/jun/30/facebook-emotion-study-breached-ethical-guidelines-researchers-say> - Researchers condemned Facebook's experiment, which manipulated nearly 700,000 users' news feeds to study emotional contagion, stating it breached ethical guidelines for informed consent. The study, conducted in 2012, involved altering users' news feeds to display more positive or negative content without their knowledge. The researchers argued that participants were harmed by the study, as it changed their mood without their consent, highlighting the need for ethical considerations in such research.
6. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/researcher-apologizes-for-facebook-study-in-emotional-manipulation/> - A Facebook data scientist apologized for a study that manipulated users' emotions by altering their News Feeds to display predominantly positive or negative statuses. The study, conducted in January 2012, involved nearly 700,000 users and aimed to analyze how emotional states are transmitted on social media. The researcher acknowledged the anxiety caused by the study's publication and stated that the benefits of the research may not have justified the distress it caused users.
7. <https://www.wired.com/2014/06/everything-you-need-to-know-about-facebooks-manipulative-experiment/> - In 2012, Facebook conducted an experiment involving 689,003 users to study emotional contagion by manipulating their News Feeds to display more positive or negative content. The study found that exposure to more positive content led users to post more positive updates, while exposure to more negative content led to more negative posts. The experiment faced criticism for its lack of transparency and ethical considerations, with concerns about informed consent and the manipulation of users' emotions without their knowledge.