

# **Reclaiming Your Social Media**

*(Why you have no control over it  
and what you can do about it)*

A White Paper

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## **Abstract**

You are likely one of the three billion people who use social media. This is how you keep in contact with friends and family, and for many, it's also how you grow your business. But current social networks are cut from the same cloth: They take your personal information, and along with it some of your security, and assault you with advertisements that slow your productivity. On top of this, these companies lack accountability to its users.

Currently these are your only options: give us your information and watch our ads, or go elsewhere. Is this really the best they can do? There is a better way and that is to move to a democratic model of social media.

In this white paper you will learn:

- What are the problems with current forms of social media
- Who is in control
- Solutions to the problem
- How this is being implemented now in a democratic social media platform

## The Problems with current social media

### Advertisements:

*“The average person will spend nearly two hours (approximately 116 minutes) on social media everyday.”* — [Social Media Today](#)

Over [5 million businesses](#) advertise on Facebook. They do this because they know they have a captive audience. Facebook alone made almost [\\$40 billion](#) from advertising in 2017. While social networks profit, users have to deal with the clutter and distraction of advertisements they never asked for in the first place.

The solution given by the company is to give users more targeted ads based on their interests. However, while this is an improvement, it does not remove the ads.

Another solution is to use an ad blocker. Ad blockers work for some forms of social media, but unsurprisingly there is a war between social media and ad blocking technology, and companies who benefit from ads are [finding ways around these ad blockers](#). While this might be a temporary solution for some, it does not permanently solve the issue. A rise in ad blocker use shows how much people want to get away from ads.



Source: <https://digiday.com/media/ad-blocking-charts/>

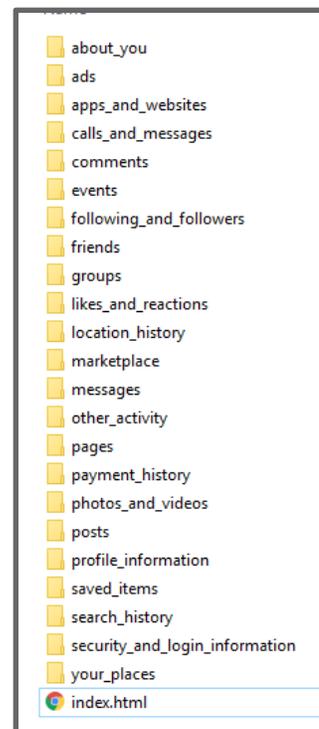
### Selling your personal information:

The greatest concern about social media is the personal information they collect. You are probably in the dark about what they have collected on you or who gets it. If you want to find

out, for instance, what Facebook has on you, follow the steps in [this article](#). You can download everything they have collected from you and view it. Here is a list of what you can expect:

- Ad interests
- Advertisers who have been given your info
- Comments made
- Friends and followers
- Groups you have joined
- Likes and reactions
- Location history (yes, everywhere you've been)
- Pages made
- Payment history
- Profile info & profile changes
- Posts, messages
- Photos and videos (they use facial recognition)
- Search history with date and time

On the right you can see a screenshot of all the categories included. Notice the ads folder. Open it and you will see a lengthy list of companies that have been given access to your information. You may not have heard of many of these companies, but they know you. Some of them know a lot about you.



*“Research has found that computers can predict someone’s personality better than that individual’s family or friends simply by analyzing 300 of the person’s Facebook ‘likes.’” — [Listverse](#)*

Your location history also comes up, and it is easy to track since most of us have our social media apps on our phones. That time they recommended you add a friend and you had just seen them at a party the other day, how did they know that? Your location history is how. They tracked both of you down and found that you were in the same location, therefore, maybe you know each other.

And every time you change your profile, they keep your old profile as well. Nothing gets discarded here.

Boston Consulting Group found that “privacy of personal data is a top issue for 76 percent of global consumers and [83 percent](#) of U.S. consumers.”

The only real solution offered here is to delete your account. This, by many, is considered a non-solution.

### Changes to the platform:

You also lack control over the platform itself. If your social network's CEO decides to take away your favorite feature, you have no say in the matter. Recently [680,000 disgruntled Snapchat users](#) signed a petition to get rid of a new update. The petition says, "With the release of the new Snapchat update, many users have found that it has not made the app easier to use, but has in fact made many features more difficult."

You are already forced to watch the ads and give up your information, so shouldn't you have a say regarding future features? This brings to mind the cry of "taxation without representation," because it is not a democratic system.

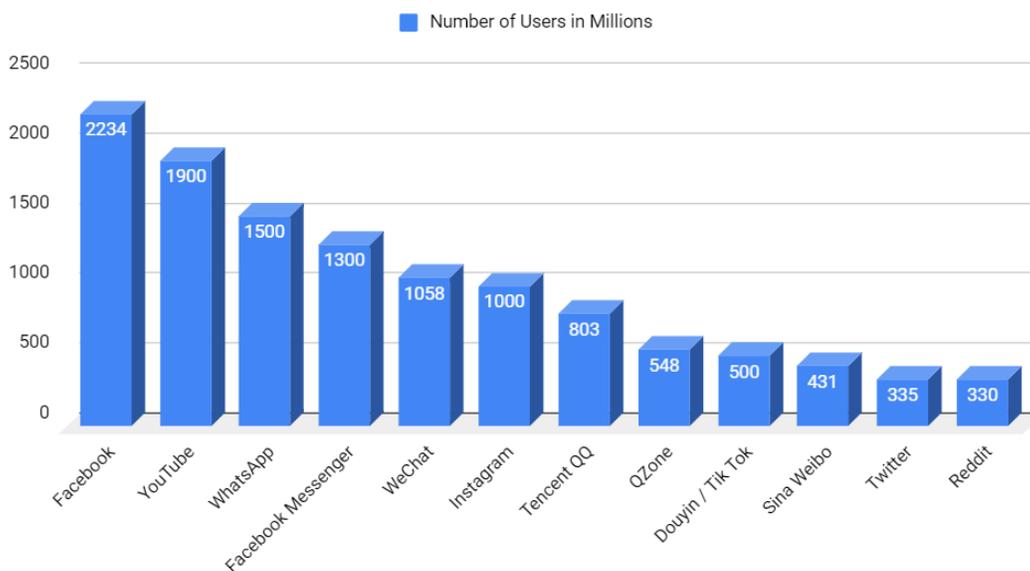
*"Beyond the taxing nature of producing content, YouTubers are at the mercy of a platform they do not fully understand. Sometimes, videos will explode on the platform, but more often than not, they'll be demonetized, or won't be surfaced to the subscribers who want to see them, meaning that a YouTuber might go through a lot of painstaking work just to end up dead on arrival." — [The Verge](#)*

Such changes especially affects business users. When the platform is how you make your sales, a change to the format can greatly affect your business. Those who use Youtube to advertise their products are at the mercy of the way Youtube's algorithm chooses who is at the top of a search. [That algorithm can change at any time](#), and jeopardize sales.

There are ways to make your voice heard, such as the petition mentioned above, but the direction of the platform is in the hands of people at the top, and you are not one of them.

## Who is in currently control? Not you.

Social Media Use Worldwide



Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/#0>

Note: **Facebook** also owns WhatsApp and Instagram.  
WeChat, Tencent QQ, and QZone are owned by **Tencent**, a Chinese social media company.

Facebook has over two billion users worldwide, but Twitter, Snapchat, Tumblr and others use the same model. These behemoths are top-down companies, where those at the top of the pyramid make money off the backs of their users.

When you sign up you unwittingly give away personal information you never intended to release. For most of us, who gets this information is also a mystery. The only disclaimer, if anyone reads the small and sometimes hidden print, is that the company will collect all the information they can get on you and sell it to whoever will pay for it. Yes, there may be methods to delete some of it, or make an account a bit more secure, but to do so means going through a rabbit trail of menus, leaving most of us in frustration and despair.

Where is the accountability in all this?

*“Facebook meticulously scrutinizes the minutiae of its users’ online lives, and its tracking stretches far beyond the company’s well-known targeted advertisements.” — [The New York Times](#)*

*“Snapchat has also introduced new privacy concerns for its users...Despite the policy explicitly stating that they have access to whatever content is sent on their app, the common belief is that whatever is sent on Snapchat disappears entirely after it has been viewed by the recipient... The fact that this commonly held belief is entirely untrue opens the door to a slew of privacy concerns for users depending on the nature of the content being sent.” — [HYPR Magazine](#)*

Unfortunately, news stories like this are common fare. As a loyal customer you are their source of income. So, do you feel valued?

## **Solution: A Democratic Platform**

The word democracy comes from the latin demos=people, kratia=rule. The best solution for the people should come *from* the people, giving them ownership. Here is how social media could be made democratic, putting the power in your hands.

### **You choose whether to see ads or not**

Ownership would mean you have the ability to control advertising. When you are subjected to advertising regardless of whether you want it, you feel a sense of powerlessness. However, if you are part owner of the platform, you should have the right to turn off these ads if you wish.

There are possible reasons why you might want to view advertising, and that is if the money paid for the ad could benefit you directly. The ability to turn off ads or receive money for viewing those you want is possible, as you will see later. This means business owners have willing viewers and viewers benefit financially.

### **You choose what happens to your information**

The same is true for the sharing of information. If you want to share your information, it should be a purposeful choice, and you should benefit from it. The idea that a customer's personal information is shared with countless other companies without their knowledge is one of the most alarming consequences of the industry. There are two solutions for this:

1. Users have control over their own information. If they want to share it with a company, they choose which information, and to whom, they will share it.
2. Personal information is stripped away from the data being shared so that the "model" of that information is shared without anything personal going out.

This "model" of information is expounded in more detail in "[Federated Learning: Collaborative Machine Learning without Centralized Training Data.](#)" According to the article by Google, it enables the service to "collaboratively learn a shared prediction model while keeping all the training data on device." Thus, no personal data is actually given away.

Ideally, both solutions above would be present in the same platform. You share only what you feel comfortable sharing, but only the model of that information is shared. And more importantly, you are paid for what you share.

## Voting On Changes

The picture of the CEO who rules everything with an iron fist must go. Instead users themselves should govern how the platform functions. That means they should have a vote, and if they are in the majority, changes should be implemented.

Perhaps the best way to accomplish voting would be to use referendums. This provides an easy and more precise voting method that can be done electronically. The [Referendum](#) website states:

“It uses the best voting method available, range voting (also known as olympic score voting), for both comments and polls. Range voting beats out approval voting, IRV, and FPTP for minimizing voter regret.”

Range voting offers you more than black and white choices, such as “yes” or “no.” Instead, you have a range of possibilities. This is often used in the Olympics. It’s why figure skaters receive a 1-10 score. But to add more nuance to the scores, range voting goes from 0-100.

Here is an example of a range voting ballot for features to a social media platform:

Feature	Range
Add a widget to check the weather	0
Put a timer in the top right	85
Integrate notifications on a desktop app	37
Have the news broken down by category	100

In this example, the user is far more interested in having news broken down by category than a widget to check the local weather. A lot more information about your preferences is provided this way. Then, once added up, those features with the highest scores should be added to the platform.

## Developed In Open Source

In order to truly have a democratic platform it must be open source. This means that everyone has ownership of the platform. Here are some benefits of [open source software](#):

1. If you want to see what is going on behind the scenes, you can view the code yourself. This keeps the company from making backroom changes to the platform.

2. Anyone can contribute to the code themselves, improving functionality and security, in a collaborative environment.
3. The software is less expensive (or free) to develop, since users themselves volunteer their time to improve the code or documentation.
4. Changes and improvements can be made much faster with many people working together.

In an open source model, users have ownership of the network as they together improve something they already care about. Some top open source applications are already in use worldwide. Some of these include Apache, Android, Linux, and WordPress.

## Summary

Social media can improve our relationships and connect those separated by great distances. Yet the current model being used strips away a lot of your freedom and gives you the feeling of being controlled and manipulated by a company where you have no representation. Having little or no control over the viewing of advertisements, collecting and selling of your personal information, and lacking any say in the direction of the platform itself has become the norm in the social networking world.

Users of social media must demand a new kind of platform. One in which you have a say in how things operate. One in which you are an owner and not just a user.

## About Clyste

There is such a democratic model currently available. Clyste is an open-source, user-owned and governed social media platform. Through open-source code, voting, and the choice of what to see and what to share, we are placing the control and development of the platform into the hands of its users. These users also benefit financially from any ads they view or data they want to share. Shared data is in the form of a model rather than the actual data, so users still retain privacy of their information.

To try Clyste now, visit [www.clyste.com](http://www.clyste.com).