

Mail Online

Facebook finally apologises for secretly manipulating nearly 1m people's accounts in huge psychology experiment

- Sheryl Sandberg apologised for 'poor communication' of the study
- Said Facebook never meant to upset users with the secret research
- Emerged that network manipulated news feeds of about 700,000 accounts
- Was part of a study to see if people's moods are affected by content
- Information Commissioner now investigating whether or not the site breached data regulations

By [Jennifer Newton](#)

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The chief operating officer of Facebook has apologised for the manipulation of 700,000 users' accounts in a controversial secret study.

Sheryl Sandberg's comments were the first from a Facebook executive since it was revealed that the social network altered users' newsfeeds to see if it had an effect on their emotions.

It was also a climb down from Tuesday's insistence that it was an experiment covered by the network's terms and conditions.

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Facebook's chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg apologised while addressing a conference in India after it was revealed the social network manipulated some users' news feeds

It emerged at the weekend, when the experiment's results were revealed in a paper published in a journal, that Facebook allowed researchers to manipulate the content that appeared in the main section, or news feed of about 700,000 randomly selected users during a single week in January 2012.

The data-scientists were trying to collect evidence to prove their thesis that people's moods could spread like an 'emotional contagion' depending on the type of the content that they were reading.

None of the participants in the Facebook experiments were explicitly asked for their permission, though the social network's terms of use appears to allow for the company to manipulate what appears in users' news feeds however it sees fits.

Facebook's data-use policy says the California-based company can deploy user information for 'internal operations, including troubleshooting, data analysis, testing, research and service improvement.'

Ms Sandberg is in India where she addressed a gathering during a session organised by Federation of Indian chambers of Commerce and Industry in New Delhi.

She said: 'This was part of ongoing research companies do to test different products, and that was what it was; it was poorly communicated.'

'And for that communication we apologise. We never meant to upset you.'

She also told television network NDTV in India during an interview that 'we clearly communicated really badly about this and that we really regret.'



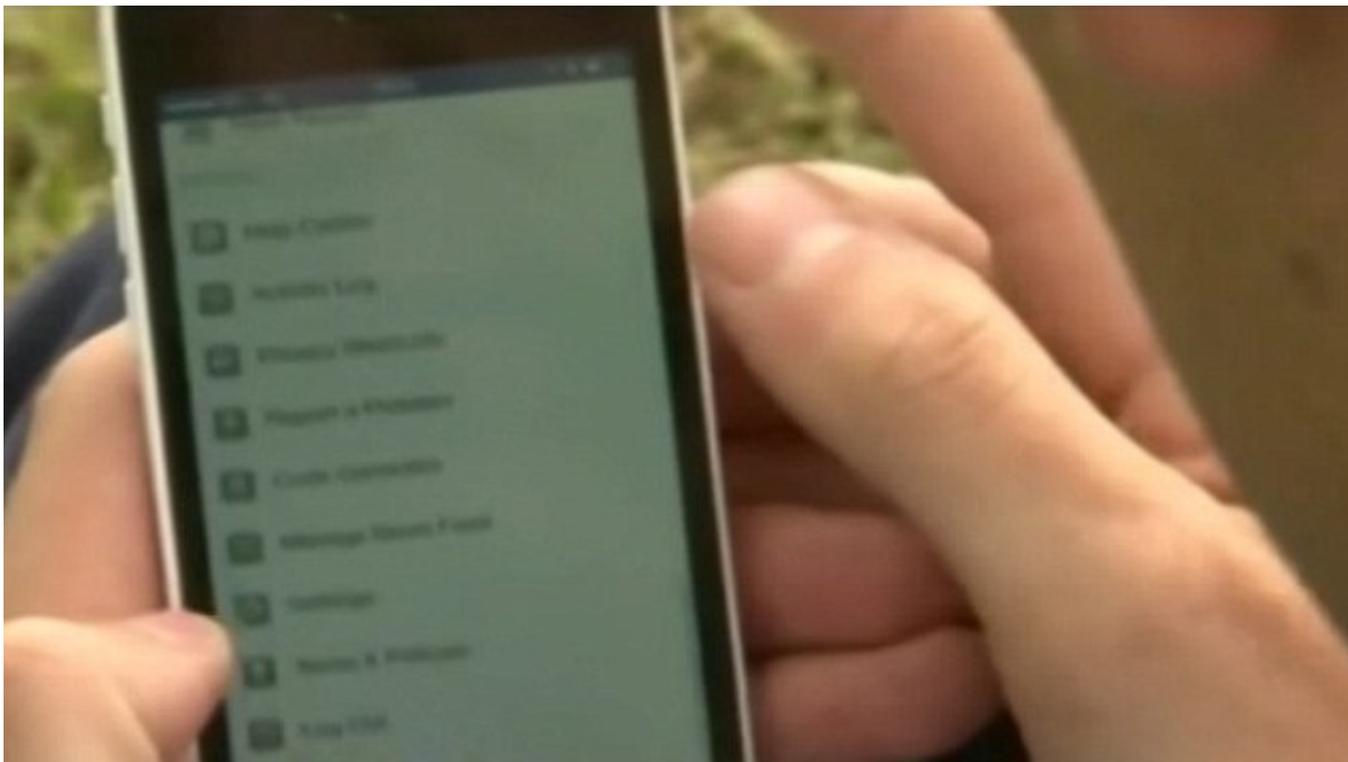
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Ms Sandberg was in New Delhi to meet entrepreneurs and businesswomen at a session organised by Federation of Indian chambers of Commerce and Industry in New Delhi

[Facebook backlash: users angry about controversial experiment](#)



Later she added: 'Facebook has apologised and certainly we never want to do anything that upsets users.'

Her comments come as it emerged today the British Information Commissioner said that it wants to learn more about the circumstances underlying the study carried out by two U.S. universities and Facebook.

The study concluded that people were more likely to post negative updates about their lives after the volume of positive information appearing in their Facebook feeds had been purposefully reduced by the researchers.

The opposite reaction occurred when the number of negative posts appeared in people's news feeds.

The inquiry is being coordinated with authorities in Ireland, where Facebook has headquarters for its European operations, as well as with French regulators.

The concern over Facebook's experiment comes amid interest in Europe about beefing up data-protection rules. The European Court of Justice last month ruled that Google must respond to users' requests seeking to remove links to personal information.



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It emerged at the weekend that Facebook allowed researchers to manipulate content as part of a study into emotions

Suzy Moat, a Warwick Business School assistant professor of behavioural science, said businesses regularly do studies on how to influence behaviour.

She cited the example of Facebook and Amazon experimenting with showing different groups of people slightly different versions of their websites to see if one is better than another at getting customers to buy products.

'On the other hand, it's extremely understandable that many people are upset that their behaviour may have been manipulated for purely scientific purposes without their consent,' she said.

'In particular, Facebook's user base is so wide that everyone wonders if they were in the experiment.'

Facebook's director of policy in Europe, Richard Allan, told MailOnline: 'It's clear that people were upset by this study and we take responsibility for it.'

'We want to do better in the future and are improving our process based on this feedback.'

'The study was done with appropriate protections for people's information and we are happy to answer any questions regulators may have.'

An official statement from the site added: 'Our academic research and publication proposals are reviewed internally when proposals are made and before they are submitted for publication.'

'This review analyses the impact on user data, including appropriate safeguards to help ensure the research does not disclose information associated with a specific person's Facebook account and that it uses the minimum amount of data required for the study.'