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Zuckerberg’s WhatsApp follies: Tight integration with Facebook is a way of selling your data to advertisers and others

Read in today's @timesofindia

We must hope that Mark Zuckerberg has more sense of humour than he publicly shows. Only a keen sense of irony could ballast him through the self-destructive storm now ravaging his empire.

In India and around the world, the low credibility he and his businesses have earned for themselves are causing people to flee #WhatsApp in droves, not because of something he has just done, but because they have finally realised what he has been doing all along.

#Facebook , as it says, is not proposing to share the content of WhatsApp chats with Facebook. It can’t. #WhatsApp has no access to the content of the messages on its own system.

#WhatsApp uses an excellent end-to-end encryption system developed by @moxie Marlinspike and his colleagues at Signal, which is free software and which WhatsApp has adopted for its own use.

#WhatsApp is not proposing to begin sharing the information of its users with Facebook, because it has been doing that all along.

Once, in 2016, for a limited time, it offered a chance to opt out. Anyone who was not using WhatsApp in 2016 or who didn’t take advantage of that offer at the time has already been ratted out by WhatsApp to #Facebook

#WhatsApp is not changing to require everyone who messages a business on WhatsApp to allow their WhatsApp profile data and their phone number to be stored on #Facebook servers for use in ad-targeting activities.

That already happens, everywhere except in Europe, where it is prohibited by European privacy law unless users explicitly opt in.

#Facebook was “only” disclosing that it already does all this pillaging of #WhatsApp users’ privacy, and forcing its users to acknowledge that they know it too, or stop using WhatsApp.

A very regrettable misunderstanding, according to Facebook. Or perhaps a regrettable understanding, which is why #Zuckerberg s capacity for the appreciation of irony is now under test.

All #WhatsApp is sharing with #Facebook and the businesses who use it as a privacy-invasion contractor is “metadata”, which means data about your identity, not the content of your family chat.

We’re supposed to think of “metadata” as less than “data”, but it isn’t: often it is more. #metadata

Your mobile number and your profile information is far more valuable to them, and more dangerous to you, than what you said to your sister about the latest cricket match.

#AUSvsIND #metadata

@signalapp protects your
conversational secrecy just as well as #WhatsApp, because WhatsApp
copies from Signal.

#Signal also protects your identity information,
while #WhatsApp and #Facebook do what they can to monetize it, and if
you don't like that you can leave. So millions of people are leaving.

Basic messaging---in the style of Signal, Telegram, or WhatsApp---is technically very simple. The protocols involved (the rules of how the software has to work at both ends of the conversation and in the middle, where the server is) are standardized, so anyone can implement
them

Protecting the secrecy of messages---so that only the intended recipients can read them and the server in the middle cannot access them---is more sophisticated, but that's now free software published by #Signal that other services can use. #FOSS

So #WhatsApp's primary innovation lies in *not* protecting the metadata, the identity information and traffic data about who uses the service, who they talk to, when, and how often.

#WhatsApp is #Signal with metadata spying.

Inadvertently---caught up in their endless churning of the misleading language of privacy policies---and heedless of the dismal record of distrustworthy conduct they have established around the world, 1/2

#Facebook just highlighted what it is they really add to the mix, and repulsed the people they offered their usual "my way or the highway" deal. 2/2

In India, and in much of the global South, #WhatsApp has also become the most important and least costly form of political communication for party campaigns.

For #Facebook, that's an immense direct subsidy
to parties and the governments they compose, allowing free, intimate, secret, and largely unaccountable communication with hundreds of millions of voters.

That subsidy and control over its use is power,
but the service is increasingly paid for by the commercial
communications between businesses and customers that also occurs there. #Facebook #whatsapp #elections

Facebook tightly integrates between #Facebook, #Instagram and #WhatsApp because targeted commercial communications are its primary business.

Global changes in #privacy rules occasionally cause it to
reveal what it would prefer to hide. Having as much influence with the world's govts as possible through its use as a medium of political propaganda has been an inherent part of that strategy, 1/2 #WhatsappPrivacy

but #Trump and other factors have made that aspect much more visible, and more risky, as well. 2/2 #WhatsappPrivacy #Facebook

Governments that want to control their people and crush dissent want #metadata. They want to know who talks to whom, when, where, and for how long.

Access to content, to the messages themselves, is also
desirable, so they never cease to agitate for it, seeking backdoors, trapdoors, infiltration points, trying to make it impossible for citizens to have secrets from govt. #cryptowars #encryption #metadata #WhatsappPrivacy

But what (metadata) is easier to get is more than enough. Farmers in protest encampments use #WhatsApp and
can be readily identified. So are young people hoping to raise their children in Hong Kong under the rule of law.

The "social graph" of who talks to who from where, when, is the basic alphabet of 21st century despotism. It's not just @elonmusk who has decided that escaping the spying service for the service without spying is a good,
perhaps a life-saving, idea. #WhatsappPrivacy