

Facebook Like: Past, Present and Future

Kumar Gaurav, Akash Sinha, Jyoti Prakash Singh
and Prabhat Kumar

Abstract As a social networking website, Facebook has a huge advantage over other sites: the emotional investment of its users. However, such investments are meaningful only if others respond to them. Facebook provides a way to its users for responding to posts by writing comments or by pressing a Like button to express their reactions. Since its activation on February 9, 2009, the Facebook Like button has evolved as an essential part of users' daily Facebook routines and a popular tool for them to express their social presence. However, the inadequacy of the Like button in expressing the original sentiments of a user towards a post has raised serious discussions among the users. It is an apparent deduction that Facebook Like disappoints at addressing the wide spectrum of emotions that an online human communication entails. It does not let the post creator ascertain that the sentiment behind his post has been perceived in its true essence. Even after the collaboration with emotions, the Like button still has a wide range of issues that needs to be addressed. The paper considers these pros and cons associated with the current Facebook Like button. The paper also provides novel technique to improve the efficiency of the Like feature by associating it with an intelligent engine for generating recommendations to the users. This, in turn, shall improve the user-posted content on Facebook.

Keywords Social media · Social network · Facebook · Like · Privacy

K. Gaurav (✉) · A. Sinha · J.P. Singh · P. Kumar
Department of Computer Science and Engineering,
National Institute of Technology Patna, Patna, India
e-mail: kumargaurav.nitp@gmail.com

A. Sinha
e-mail: akash.cse15@nitp.ac.in

J.P. Singh
e-mail: jps@nitp.ac.in

P. Kumar
e-mail: prabhat@nitp.ac.in

1 Introduction

Social networking has brought the world closer in dimensions which besides being fascinating in comprehension are quite pragmatic in implementation. Just few years after Mark Zuckerberg found “The Facebook” in his dorm room as a way for the students of Harvard University to create and maintain social ties, the company joined the ranks of the Web’s great superpowers. With 1.44 billion monthly active users in early 2015 [1], Facebook has turned up as the leading player in the social networking domain in most of the countries. Surviving in an arena where consistent innovation is persistently required, Facebook has reflected commendable improvements over time. The changes in the News Feed algorithm, transforming Facebook into a “perfect personalized newspaper”, have added yet another feather to its cap. However, in the attempt to maneuver new ways for ceaseless updating of features like Adding a Legacy Contact, On This Day Facebook, history browsing, etc., a key feature has been left unattended since long, the iconic Facebook Like button.

The Facebook Help feature mentions that clicking the Like button available underneath a Facebook post “is an easy way to let someone know that you enjoy it, without leaving a comment. Just like a comment though, the fact that you liked the post is visible below it” [2]. However, as a broader portion of the population becomes Facebook members, the website will be used in increasingly varied ways [3], which might also lead to the disparities in people’s perception and use of the like button. Figure 1 shows the iconic Like button of Facebook.

Recently, the application of Like button has raised a few questions originating from the dilemma it often leads its users into. Numerous instances have been witnessed by the users of Facebook irrespective of their geographical existence where they were reluctant at clicking on the Facebook Like button because it hardly expressed their original sentiment.

2 Yesterday of Like

When was the last time you were going through your news feed on Facebook and happened to come across a post pertaining to a grave social issue with a hint of melancholy like a post which mentions about lives lost in a terrorist attack or about how a friend lost someone from his/her family and felt uncomfortable at clicking the Facebook Like button. You wish to console your friend by doing something that would convey your regret for the trauma he is going through. But again all you are left with is a button that fails at reciprocating the plausible gesture. The more

Fig. 1 Facebook Like button



optimistic mediators among our lot may come up with a very convenient solution saying that we can always choose to comment on things we can't like. But that's like doing another thing when we don't have the one thing we would like to do in the first place.

One of the crucial advantages of an online social network is that one gets a medium of communication with a comparatively greater scalability than the conventional offline medium of communication [4, 5]. The reach of any message is wider and the propagation of the message scales up to meet the definition of virality. Such a medium that has the potential to address a large audience offers a platform conducive for conducting and propagating a mass movement. An instance for the aforesaid situation in the context of Facebook could be a post that has the objective of spreading awareness about a missing child. The parents lose contact with their child in an unfortunate incident and therefore decide to take the matter to the online social network. They create a post on Facebook containing physical description about the child, the information concerning the missing status of the child and a request for an earnest intimation to the parents in case if anyone who has been notified about the incident happens to spot the missing child. Their Facebook friends wish to convey their support to the parents in their hour of need. Are they supposed to do that by clicking on the Facebook Like button? The logical answer would arise that they won't use the Like button. But what if some of the online friends do? Be it ignorance or haste, the culprit could be any factor but down the line the fact remains that the faux pas could be committed.

There are times when the context of a post plays a more prominent role than the content itself. There are numerous instances where approximately same contents provide varied meanings some of which could even be in contradiction to each other. Suppose there is a scenario where a Facebook user shares a post: "I came fourth in the 100 m race finishing only a second later than the one who came third." And there is another scenario where a user shares a post: "I came fourth in the National Science Olympiad." Now, even a cursory glance will suffice in leading anyone to the conclusion that the content of both the posts are in line provided that only the opening three words are taken into consideration. But the same verdict cannot be passed on for the context.

There is a considerable contrast in the sentiments invoked or pursued by the aforementioned posts. The first scenario reveals about a result submerged in the colors of regret. He is sorry that he could not achieve at least the third position. In the best case scenario what he will be receiving should comprise of empathetic responses. At best, he needs encouragement from that section of the online society with which he is sharing his near-success-turned-failure episode. On the contrary, he receives only 'likes' of those interested in responding to his post.

In the second scenario, the user has posted about securing the same rank as in the first scenario but the platform for the performance has altered. Securing a fourth rank in the National Science Olympiad is an achievement in a general sense. Of course, sense of achievement or failure is a question of perception and varies from person to person. But that triggers a different chain of studies. Generally speaking, the person securing such a rank, as mentioned in the aforesaid scenario, has earned

a sense of general appreciation from the online social community with whom he has shared the post. Here the Like button reciprocates the kind of reaction expected by the creator/sharer of the post and thus helps in building the relationship on the online social network.

In the former case the social network lost in providing the kind of reciprocation inducted from the post and which would have met the expectations of the creator/sharer of the post. The person receiving likes on the post that was meant to represent his conveyance of regret shall feel offended or disappointed for the fact that the readers of the post failed to comprehend his true sentiments. The same might not to be true for the readers (Facebook users) who had no other (read quick) option than to Like the post. They might have comprehended the true intent of the post but were swayed in the action of clicking the Like button subject to the absence of any other alternative. The goal of any social network is building relationships but in scenarios like the latter one Facebook fails to meet its most cardinal goal.

To counteract the anomalies discerned in resorting to Facebook Like button, new alternatives have to emerge. And these alternatives need to be devised with diligence of a higher order because online social platforms as such are found to be potent tools that mirror and magnify the good, the bad and the ugly [6].

3 The Counterpart of Like: *Dislike*

Provision for a Dislike button has been proposed and explored on various occasions since a long period of time. Instances of users raising concerns for implementation of such an alternative have been witnessed often. The story behind the quest for such a button on Facebook is of considerable length and spun out of viral campaigns, false notions, skeptical marketing strategies and spam. The button has never been considered for implementation even in any of the test forms of Facebook. However, the idea of such a button has been widely discussed and debated over within the headquarters of Facebook in light of the creation of countless profiles, communities, groups and pages demanding for provision of such a social plug-in. The Facebook development team doesn't seem to reflect much regard for any argument in favor of such a modification. They are convinced that disapproval is not a beneficial gesture for its users since it runs the risk of generating negativity on the social platform. What would often feel playful to the user in 'disliking' a post could inflict pain to the recipient of the dislike by it being overly critical or judgmental.

A Dislike button is also counterproductive to the financial gains of Facebook. Facebook is a platform where we log in after returning brain-dead from work, where we scroll through the wall posts or newsfeed aimlessly just before falling asleep and after waking up. We wander there in our leisure simply to take a break from the monotony of our lives. If we were ever to humanize Facebook then pleasant, amusing or congenial would likely be the first few appropriate

characteristics that we would consider attributing to its personality. It is quite evident from all of the above that a Dislike button is in clear contradiction to the popular image of the social network. It will eventually institute negativity in an otherwise positive platform and will eventually repel its own users leading to a clear downfall in the traffic.

The users can still convey a wide spectrum of responses through comments representing general appreciation as well as criticism. However, consideration and practice of less affirmative or rather negative shades of comments more prominently in mainstream communication would facilitate and encourage negativity in an amount that might prove detrimental to the inclination of the users to such social media platforms.

4 Today of Like

Recently, Facebook has introduced a new feature called ‘Reactions’, as shown in Fig. 2. Whereas liking tells your friends that you enjoyed their post, reacting allows you to specify your response [2].

The inclusion of five more buttons has reinforced the ability to emote better but it has also brought certain complications latent in its operation. In the pre-‘Reactions’ era, the users of the online social network had only to take a decision about whether they were going to Like something or not. Now they are supposed to not just take a decision about whether they wish to like something or not but also to choose the degree of their liking or disliking it. Loving some post in the context of communication on Facebook is a superlative manifestation of liking it. The user needs to discern between two posts in order to justify his decision of whether liking it or loving it. Similarly, in case of disliking a post a user has to decide whether he wishes to express simply his sadness over the post or escalate to a level higher and express indignation. Thus, in all cases the indulgence considering the time and effort in regard of the clicks infer at its manifold increment.

There is another issue with the operation of the feature ‘Reactions’. Theory predicts that conforming behavior occurs when status is signaled through publicly observed actions and individuals’ concern about social status is sufficiently high [7]. In a hypothetical scenario, each user is supposed to reciprocate his individual reaction on a certain post. The reaction is supposed to be a representation of his



Fig. 2 Facebook Like with emotions

original sentiment independent of any constraints. On the contrary, a user's choice of reaction in the aura of the 'Reactions' may be less of his individual reaction and coincide more with the average opinion of his peer group. He may eschew from making a reaction that is in contradiction with the overall reaction of the group of individuals with whom he is in a close proximity or related in a manner which may subject him to any form of intimidation. 'Reactions' tends to be less of a statement of an individual's perception and more of the average of the reactions of individual clusters of the society. Hence, the feature of 'Reactions' has an inherent drawback from psychological perspective of a user and his social background.

5 Tomorrow of Like

Several studies have shed light on the application of analyzing online behavior for user profiling [8]. Mining of online social behavior data for efficient prediction of real-life conditions like depression [9] and stress [10] has witnessed identification of common behavior patterns and astonishing revelation.

Considering the dominance of common patterns in online social interaction, an intelligent engine could be proposed as the future of Facebook content-'liking' or 'reacting'. The function of this intelligent engine would be to pose intelligent alerts or recommendations on detection of semantic anomalies in content-'liking' or 'reacting'. The engine would monitor the trending topics and analyze the contents of the post being shared. It may then choose to suggest intelligent alerts/recommendations selectively when users under ignorance or negligence happen to 'like' or 'react' on a sensitive issue in a manner detrimental to global peace and harmony. The engine shall analyze the post at the time it is being posted. An additional flag corresponding to the post can be utilized that shall indicate whether to provide alert to the users reacting to the post. This intelligent alert system shall provoke the users to reconsider their expression of emotions on the social media portal. However, a general dilemma can pose as an ineludible limitation in determining whether the recommendation provided is in contradiction to the general opinion or inflicts any offence to a particular sect or belief.

Another enhancement may involve assigning weights to different Reactions. Different Reactions can be weighted differently by News Feed to do a better job of showing everyone the stories they most want to see. This enhancement is driven by the fact that a user may wish to glance at the stories or posts with which he associates positive reactions. In light of the fact that more emphasis is being laid on paid social media marketing [11], which is similar to interruption-based marketing, the aforementioned enhancement is the need of the hour. The enhancement aims to reinstate the elements of a permission-based marketing which is the key feature of an organic social media.

6 Privacy of Like

Various studies have confirmed that peer pressure plays a crucial role in altering the decisions of a particular individual or a group [12]. Peer pressure, in the context of social network, refers to the kind of influence a peer group, an individual or certain observers exert on others that manipulates them to alter their opinions, reactions or social behavior in order to comply or conform to those of the dominant individual or peer group. The groups that are affected over the social network include membership groups in which the individuals are actual members such as in case of trade unions, political parties etc. as well as cliques where there is absence of any clear definition of the membership of the individuals. However, it is not mandatory for an individual to seek membership or pose as a member of a group in order to be

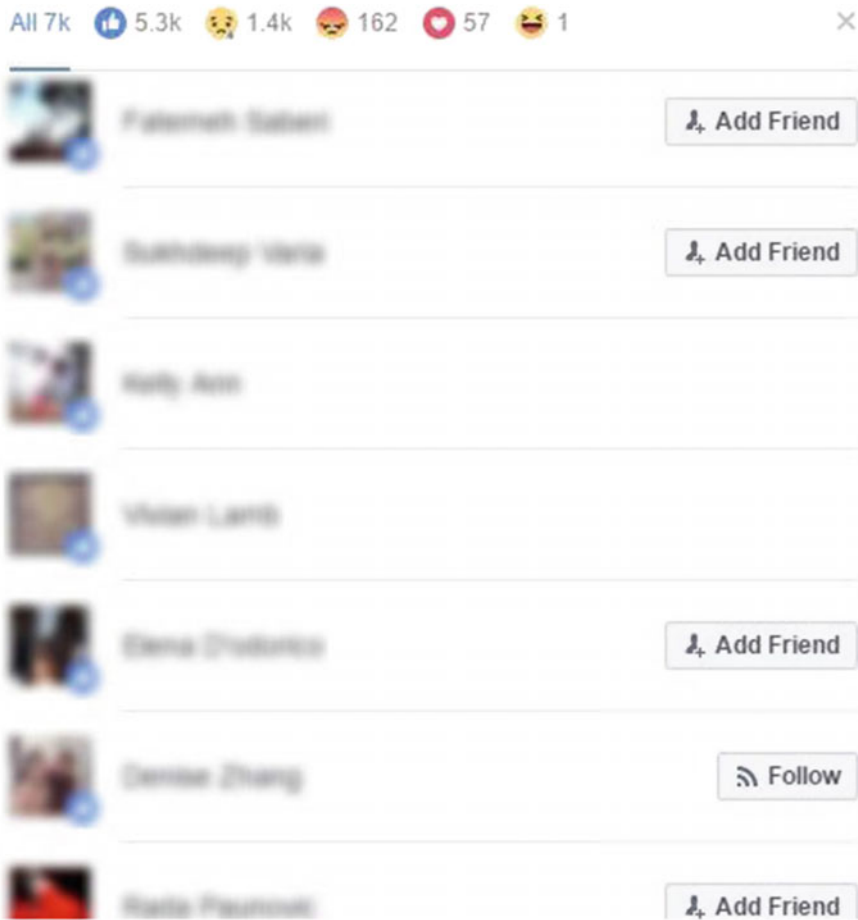


Fig. 3 Facebook 'Reactions' screen



Fig. 4 Minimalistic version of Facebook ‘Reactions’ screen

influenced under peer pressure. There are also dissociative groups with which one chooses to avoid any linkage or association and, thus, maintains a behavior which is in contradiction to that of the group(s).

It is only natural to assume that in such cases it is better to conceal the individuality of those ‘liking’ or ‘reacting’ on the social media platform. However, there is a very fine line of demarcation between privacy and anonymity. The concealment has to be in such a measure that does not violate or intrigue the key characteristic of social network: sharing. Therefore, privacy of its users and their contributions is a major concern for social network that is supposed to pose as a driving factor for future research on Like and the new entrant, ‘Reactions’. Figure 3 shows the present setup of the screen that pops up on clicking the ‘Reactions’ button on Facebook.

To cope up with the issue of the user’s reactions being driven by the average opinion of the peer group, a unified view of the overall reactions can be displayed to the users instead of providing a list of who has reacted and how. This unified view of the overall reactions can be represented numerically in tabular form or in pictorial form using an illustration such as a graph, pie chart, etc. A minimalistic view of the reactions, as shown in Fig. 4, is also a viable option.

This shall help in curtailing the emotions of particular individuals towards the post that may, otherwise, enforce other individuals to express themselves in the same manner or in a biased contradiction to it.

7 Conclusion

The transition of the iconic Facebook Like button from being the only solitary alternative to a unitary assortment of basic reactions is quite commendable but the objective of its inclusion has not been fulfilled in its entirety yet. The paper provides a comprehensive view on the positive and negative aspects of the Facebook Like button. It also considers ways to enhance the efficiency and productivity of Like feature. The proposed approach can also be utilized for preventing the spread of negative posts on the social media. Facebook’s liking or rather reciprocating tool needs to evolve through time in order to remain efficacious and instrumental in providing for a means of online sharing and social networking that is consistently contemporary.

References

1. Protalinski, E.: Facebook passes 1.44B monthly active users and 1.25B mobile users; 65% are now daily users (2015). <http://venturebeat.com/2015/04/22/facebook-passes-1-44b-monthly-active-users-1-25b-mobile-users-and-936-million-daily-users/>
2. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/help/933093216805622>
3. Brandtzæg, P.B.: Social networking sites: their users and social implications—a longitudinal study. *J. Comput. Mediat. Commun.* **17**(4), 467–488 (2012)
4. Ross, C., Orr, E.S., Sisc, M., Arseneault, J.M., Simmering, M.G., Orr, R.R.: Personality and motivations associated with facebook use. *Comput. Hum. Behav.* **25**(2), 578–586 (2009)
5. Bargh, J.A., McKenna, K.Y.: the internet and social life. *Annu. Rev. Psychol.* **55**, 573–590 (2004)
6. Hamburger, E.: The area of Facebook is an anomaly (2014). <http://www.theverge.com/2014/3/13/5488558/danah-boyd-interview-the-era-of-facebook-is-an-anomaly>
7. Bernheim, B.D.: A theory of conformity. *J. Polit. Econ.* **102**(5), 841–877 (1994)
8. Devineni, P., Koutra, D., Faloutsos, M., Faloutsos, C.: If walls could talk: patterns and anomalies in Facebook wallposts. In: Proceedings of the 2015 IEEE/ACM International Conference on Advances in Social Networks Analysis and Mining 2015 (ASONAM '15), pp. 367–374, New York (2015)
9. Choudhury, M.D., Counts, S., Horvitz, E.J., Hoff, A.: Characterizing and predicting postpartum depression from shared facebook data. In: Proceedings of the 17th ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work and Social Computing (CSCW '14), pp. 626–638, New York (2014)
10. Wang, R., Chen, F., Chen, Z., Li, T., Harari, G., Tignor, S., Zhou, X., Ben-Zeev, D., Campbell, A.T.: StudentLife: assessing mental health, academic performance and behavioral trends of college students using smartphones. In: Proceedings of the 2014 ACM International Joint Conference on Pervasive and Ubiquitous Computing (UbiComp '14), pp. 3–14, New York (2014)
11. Neher, K.: The future of social media: paid vs. organic (2014). <https://www.clickz.com/the-future-of-social-media-paid-vs-organic/29078/>
12. Durkin, K.: Peer Pressure. *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social Psychology* (1996). http://www.blackwellreference.com/public/tocnode?id=g9780631202899_chunk_g978063120289918_ss1-4