

## FACEBOOK TAKES ON A BIGGER ROLE IN JOURNALISM

**NEW YORK:** Facebook is launching a journalism project aimed at strengthening its ties with media organizations to help them expand their audiences, come up with new products and generally promote trusted news in today's "post-truth" era. The project is in its early stages and as such, light on specifics. But the company envisions Facebook engineers working with news organizations to create new ways of telling stories and novel advertising or subscription models, right from the early stages of development. The company also wants to help promote "news literacy" and support local news. "It's very early in the process but certainly something we are really excited about," said Dave Merrell, lead product manager at The Washington Post, which is among the news organizations working with Facebook. "We worked with Facebook on numerous products over the years, but often were not involved in the product development stage."

### Instant gratification

With "Instant Articles," launched in 2015, the social network hosts and displays news items directly instead of pointing users to news websites. Such instant stories load faster on Facebook than those on outside links, and Facebook gives participating publishers a cut of the advertising revenue from Instant Articles. But publishers also lose some of their ability to connect with their readers, understand their browsing habits and direct them to other stories and video.

So Facebook plans to start testing a new feature of Instant Articles that will show readers multiple stories from the same news organization. As part of that change, Facebook could also improve the way its algorithms recommend other stories - that "people also shared" - to users. Its automated system has sometimes suggested purported news articles that included unverified information or that were only marginally related to the original story.

### Facebook grows up

The move suggests Facebook is starting to accept its outsized influence over how people get their news, even if it's not a traditional publisher itself. According to the Pew Research Center, more than 40 percent of American adults get news on Facebook. And it follows the company's announcement last month that it is taking new measures to curb the spread of fake and misleading news on its huge and influential network. The news literacy aspect of the project is relevant to that effort. Facebook says it will work with outside organizations on how to help "people in our community have the information they need to make decisions about which sources to trust."

To start, the company is working with the News Literacy Project to produce a series of public service advertisements on the issue. But Facebook acknowledges that its efforts to fight fake news, such as by making it easier for users to report false articles and working with outside fact-checkers to debunk such stories, are still very early. The journalism project's goal is to increase transparency and help Facebook figure out its role in news, Facebook product director Fidji Simo said in an interview. "(With) being a new kind of platform comes a new kind of responsibility," she said. "It's definitely something we are thinking about very carefully." Working with news organizations, she added, will hopefully lead to products that will be "better than what we would have done on our own."—AP



**PHILADELPHIA:** In this file photo, the Facebook logo is displayed on an iPad in Philadelphia.—AP



**SALT LAKE CITY:** In this file photo, an examiner at an FBI digital forensics lab views data extracted easily from a smartphone, in Salt Lake City.—AP

## PHONE HACKING COMPANY FALLS VICTIM TO HACKERS

**SALT LAKE CITY:** Cellebrite, a digital forensics firm known for helping law enforcement crack into locked smartphones, has itself fallen victim to hackers. Technology news website Motherboard said Thursday that it had obtained 900 gigabytes of data related to the Israel-based company. It said the trove of data includes customer information, databases and technical data about the company's products. Cellebrite released a statement Thursday acknowledging that one of its external web servers had been hacked, adding that that it's investigating the extent of the breach.

### Data dump

Motherboard journalist Joseph Cox said that an unidentified hacker gave him 900 gigabytes of data from Cellebrite's servers. In a series of messages posted to Twitter, he said that most of the data consisted of technical information, evidence and log files but that some of the information contained customer data. In an article, Cox wrote that the trove contained messages from authorities in Russia, Turkey and the Arab Gulf. Cellebrite could be in for more unwelcome attention. Cox said that Motherboard would "likely be doing more stories from the data." According to Cellebrite, the server in question included a database backup of an old license management system. It said the hackers accessed basic user contact information and encrypted passwords for users who had not yet moved to the company's new system. While Cellebrite says it's not aware of any risk to customers as a result of the breach, it's still advising them to change their passwords.

### Hacking the hackers

Cellebrite, founded in 1999, has contracts with the FBI dating back to at least

2013. The firm makes devices that allow law enforcement to extract and decode data such as contacts, pictures and text messages from more than 15,000 kinds of smartphones and other mobile devices. It also makes commercial products that companies can use to help their customers transfer data from old phones to new ones. The company found itself in the spotlight last year after some industry observers speculated that it might have helped the FBI hack into an iPhone used by one of the

killer in the San Bernardino, California, mass shooting.

That phone was the subject of a major legal fight between the FBI and Apple; the company refused to help break iPhone security. The FBI dropped its case after finding another way into the phone. Cellebrite claims to do business with thousands of law enforcement and intelligence agencies, militaries and governments in more than 100 countries. But its involvement in the San Bernardino case was never proven.—AP

## MONOPOLY SUIT AGAINST APPLE'S APP STORE GETS NEW LIFE

**SAN FRANCISCO:** A US appeals court on Thursday revived a civil suit accusing Apple of creating a monopoly by making its App Store the only place to buy iPhone applications. The suit, initially filed in late 2011, seeks hundreds of millions of dollars in damages based on the reasoning that the lack of competition pushed app prices higher. An appellate court panel in San Francisco reversed a lower court judge's decision to derail the suit on the grounds iPhone owners were doing business with app creators and not Apple at the online shop.

"The panel reversed the dismissal for lack of statutory standing of an antitrust complaint alleging that Apple, Inc., monopolized and attempted to monopolize the market for iPhone apps," the US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit said in a written ruling. "The panel held that the plaintiffs were direct purchasers of iPhone apps from Apple, rather than the app developers, and therefore had standing to sue." The ruling gave a green light for the suit to resume, paving the

way for a potential big-money payout or even an open market for apps for Apple devices. Apple launched the iPhone in 2007, creating a walled garden into which only applications approved by the California-based company were permitted.

A year later, Apple launched the App Store as an online shop for apps and other content for iPhones, with the company getting to approve offerings and taking 30 percent of the price of what third-party developers sold there. In the motion that got the case dismissed, Apple had argued that iPhone owners were doing business with app makers and therefore lacked the standing to sue the company in the matter. However, the appellate panel ruled that Apple "is a distributor of the iPhone apps, selling them directly to purchasers through its App Store." "Because Apple is a distributor, Plaintiffs have standing under Illinois Brick to sue Apple for allegedly monopolizing and attempting to monopolize the sale of iPhone apps," it said.—AFP