[Technology is about empowering people](https://nation.com.pk/09-Feb-2019/technology-is-about-empowering-people" \t "_new)

Mark Zuckerberg February 09, 2019 the nation

Next month, Facebook turns 15. When I started Facebook, I wasn’t trying to build a global company. Back then, I realized you could find almost anything on the internet -- music, books, information -- except for the thing that matters most: people. So I built a service that people could use to connect and learn about each other. Over the years, billions of people have found this useful, and we’ve built more services that people around the world love and use every day.

Recently I’ve heard many questions about our business model, so I want to explain the principles of how we operate.

I believe everyone should have a voice and be able to connect. If we’re committed to serving everyone, then we need a service that is affordable to everyone. The best way to do that is to offer services for free, which ads enable us to do.

People consistently tell us that if they’re going to see ads, they want them to be relevant. That means we need to understand what they’re interested in. So based on what pages people like, what they click on and more, we create categories -- for example, people who like pages about gardening and live in Spain -- and then charge advertisers to show ads to that category of people. While advertising to specific groups existed well before the internet, online advertising allows much more precise targeting and therefore more relevant ads.

The internet also allows us to offer far greater transparency and control over what ads you see than TV, radio or print. On our services, you have control over what information we use to show you ads, and you can block any advertiser from reaching you. You can find out why you’re seeing an ad and change your preferences to get ads you’re interested in. And you can use our transparency tools to see every different ad an advertiser is showing to anyone else.

Still, some are concerned about the complexity of this model. In a regular transaction, you pay a company for a product or service they provide. That’s simple. But here you get to use our services for free -- and we work separately with advertisers to show you relevant ads. This model can feel opaque, and we’re all inherently distrustful of systems we don’t understand.

Sometimes this means people assume we do things that we don’t do. For example, we don’t sell people’s data, even though it’s often reported that we do. In fact, selling people’s information to advertisers would be counter to our business interests, because it would reduce the unique value of our service to advertisers. We have a strong incentive to protect people’s information from being accessed by anyone else.

Some people worry that ads create a misalignment of interests between us and people who use our products. I’m often asked if we have an incentive to increase engagement on Facebook because that creates more advertising real estate -- even if it’s not in people’s best interests.

I want to be clear: we’re very focused on helping people share and connect more, because the purpose of our service is to help people stay in touch with family, friends, and communities. But from a business perspective, it’s important that people’s time is well spent or they won’t use our services as much over the long term. Clickbait and other junk may drive engagement in the near term, but it would be foolish for us to intentionally show this because it’s not what people want.

Another question is whether we leave harmful or divisive content up because it drives engagement. The answer is no. People consistently tell us they don’t want to see this content. Advertisers don’t want their brands anywhere near it either. The only reason bad content remains is because the people and AI systems we use to review it are still evolving and improving -- not because we have an incentive to ignore it.

Finally, there’s the important question of whether the ads model encourages companies like ours to use and store more information than we otherwise would to provide consumer services.

In this case, there’s no question that we collect some information for ads -- but that information is generally important for security and operating our services as well. For example, companies often put code in their apps and websites so when a person checks out an item, they can show ads later to remind them to complete their purchase. But this type of signal can also be important for detecting fraud or fake accounts. We give people complete control over whether we use this information for ads, but we don’t let people control how we use this information for security or operating our services. And when we asked people for permission to use this information to improve their ads as part of our GDPR compliance, the vast majority of people said they wanted us to do this because they prefer more relevant ads.

Ultimately, I believe the most important principles around data are transparency, choice and control. We need to be clear about the ways we’re using information, and people need to have clear choices about how they want their information used. We believe regulation that codifies these principles across the whole internet would be good for everyone.

It’s important to get this right, because there are clear benefits to this business model. Billions of people get a free service to stay connected to the people they care about and to express themselves. Small businesses around the world get access to tools to grow and create jobs.

There are over 90 million small businesses on Facebook, and they make up a large part of our business. Most couldn’t afford to buy TV ads or billboards, but now they have access to the same tools that previously only big companies could.

That creates huge opportunities, since small businesses create most of the jobs and economic growth around the world. In a global survey, half of the businesses on Facebook say they’ve hired more people since they joined. This means they’re using our services to create millions of jobs. To put this in perspective, the entire US economy created 2.6 million jobs last year.

For us, technology has always been about putting power in the hands of as many people as possible. If you believe in a world where everyone gets to use their voice and gets an equal chance to be heard, where everyone can start a business from scratch -- then it’s important to build technology that serves everyone. That’s the world we’re building for every day, and our business model makes this possible.

The writer is the founder, chairman and CEO of Facebook, which he founded in 2004. Mark is responsible for setting the overall direction and product strategy for the company. He leads the design of Facebook’s service and development of its core technology and infrastructure. Mark studied computer science at Harvard University before moving the company to Palo Alto, California.