

Facebook Without News Would Be Even Worse | The Atlantic

By Kaitlyn Tiffany

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In February 2021, Facebook abruptly wiped all of the news from its platform in Australia. The country's lawmakers were trying to force the company to share its profits with media outlets, and this was the dramatic response. The gambit worked: After a nearly week-long blackout, which extended to pages from Australian nonprofits and government services, the new regulations were scaled back. "A digitally savvy nation woke up Thursday to a shock on Facebook: The news was gone," *The New York Times'* Sydney-bureau chief, Damien Cave, wrote at the time. "More frightening was what remained: pages dedicated to aliens and U.F.O.s; one for a community group called Say No to Vaccines; and plenty of conspiracy theories, some falsely linking 5G to infertility, others spreading lies about Bill Gates and the end of the world." He described Australians "wandering" around a newsless Facebook, "dazed as if after a flood." This incident inspired a journalism professor named Jean-Hugues Roy, at the University of Quebec in Montreal, to conduct an experiment.

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