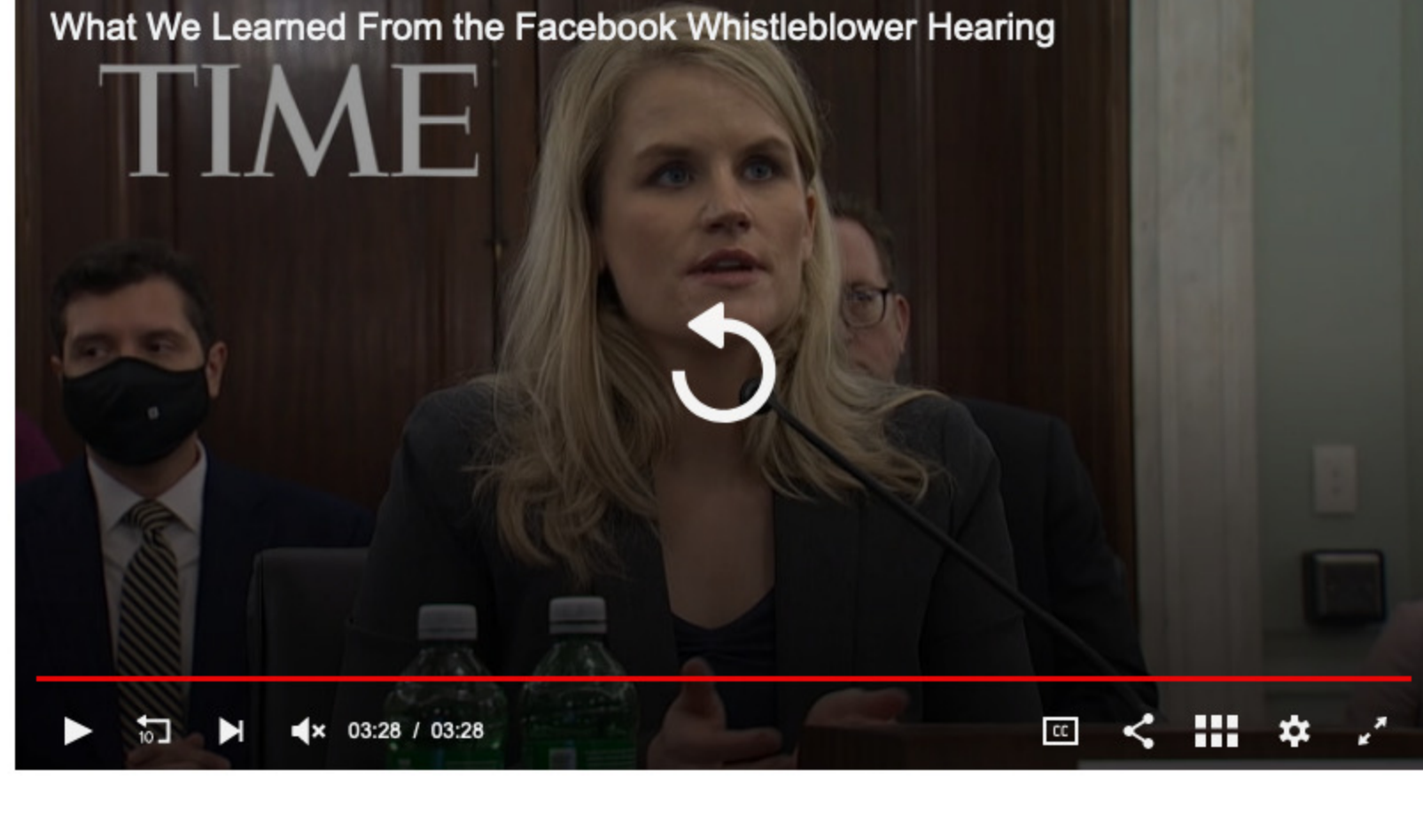


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# A New Name Won't Fix Facebook



BY NIK POPLI OCTOBER 21, 2021 2:48 PM EDT

When an established company becomes fraught with scandal, advisers will often suggest changing the subject to distract from its mistakes. It's usually a last resort effort, but the kind of textbook public relations move that advisers crave.

Facebook may be planning to do just that by unveiling a new name next week, according to a report from [The Verge](#), as it faces its biggest scandal in years after a whistleblower leaked thousands of internal documents. Although Facebook has not confirmed the report, many suspect the company is attempting to stave off the tsunami of bad press following misinformation on its platforms, content moderation failures and revelations about the negative effect its products have on users' mental health. For a brand like Facebook, marred by these concerns for years, a rename might give itself a chance to overcome some of its reputational damage. After all, it wouldn't be the first corporate business to seek a clean slate with a new moniker. But experts say Facebook will have to do a lot more than just change its name in order to regain user trust.



"There's no name that's going to rehabilitate the behavior that they've displayed so far," says Laurel Sutton, co-founder of the branding agency Catchword. "Maybe put that time and energy into rehabilitating their morals and ethics and business decisions rather than just trying to slap a new name on something."

Mike Carr, CEO of the branding agency NameStormers, concurs: "Sounds like a cop out and an impossible task... Facebook has got ink all over their face and their reputation—it's like now they're throwing in the towel and giving up because there's no way to save Facebook."



Cigarette-maker Philip Morris tried this strategy in 2003 when it rebranded as Altria Group as a way to shift attention from its darker past. British Petroleum attempted the same strategy in the late '90s under the name BP Amoco, and later BP, in an effort to improve its environmental image. According to Sutton: "it didn't do anything."

"People still knew that Altria was Philip Morris and they didn't rehabilitate their reputation simply because they changed the name," she says.

According to Carr, that's because a sudden name change following a major scandal likely leads people to believe a company admits to wrongdoing. Rather than starting fresh, he suggests a better strategy for a company at a crossroads like Facebook is to admit failure and rebrand using an existing name.

Read more: [Facebook Will Not Fix Itself](#)

Historically, only a few major corporations have changed established brands. Japanese car company Datsun became Nissan in 1981, Andersen Consulting became Accenture in 2001, and Lucky and GoldStar Co. became LG Electronics in 1995 — but none of these companies were marred by a major scandal.

For a conglomerate the size of Facebook to rebrand, it would take at least six months to develop and research the name alone—from trademarks and copyright to domains and SEO—and the cost would likely be upwards of millions of dollars due to the legal leg work, according to Sutton. "It's an extremely difficult process," she says. If Facebook is indeed rebranding next week, it likely began the process well before Frances Haugen's testimony.

In fact, Facebook has been hinting at a rebrand for years, according to Siva Vaidyanathan, a media studies professor at the University of Virginia, whose book, *Antisocial Media*, examines the company's sins.

"The Facebook of today has never been the end game for Zuckerberg," Vaidyanathan says. "He's always wanted his company to be the operating system of our lives that can socially engineer how we live and what we know."

Despite the scrutiny and negative publicity, Vaidyanathan doesn't believe the attention bothers the billionaire CEO, and his plans for renaming Facebook were likely already in the works. "It's not going to change his vision for his company—he's never let anybody on the outside change his mind."

Read more: [How Facebook Forced a Reckoning by Shutting Down the Team That Put People Ahead of Profits](#)

Facebook's new name, according to reports, will reflect its focus on building a metaverse—a virtual world that Zuckerberg says would unite the company's various products and services beyond social media. The rebrand is expected to mirror Google's 2015 reorganization when it introduced Alphabet as a holding company housing its various apps and entities. Facebook announced earlier this week that it will hire 10,000 employees to work on creating this metaverse, which according to Vaidyanathan, will use embedded sensors, cameras and microphones to "feed data into a central system" that will help the company make personalized recommendations for users on topics like what to buy or read.

"He wants to take the dynamic of algorithmic guidance out of our phones and off of our computers and build that system into our lives and our consciousness," Vaidyanathan says. "So our eyeglasses become our screens, and our hands become the mouse."

The result, he says, is a virtual and augmented reality world in which people can communicate in real time as digital avatars, yet maintain little to no control over their privacy.

Given Zuckerberg's interest in this metaverse, Vaidyanathan suggests Facebook could rebrand as "Horizon" or "Matrix." Carr proposes the company should go a different route and change its perception to a socially responsible company that allows users to support causes and join movements: "perhaps Me&, highlighting that the platform can be used for more than just posts about oneself."

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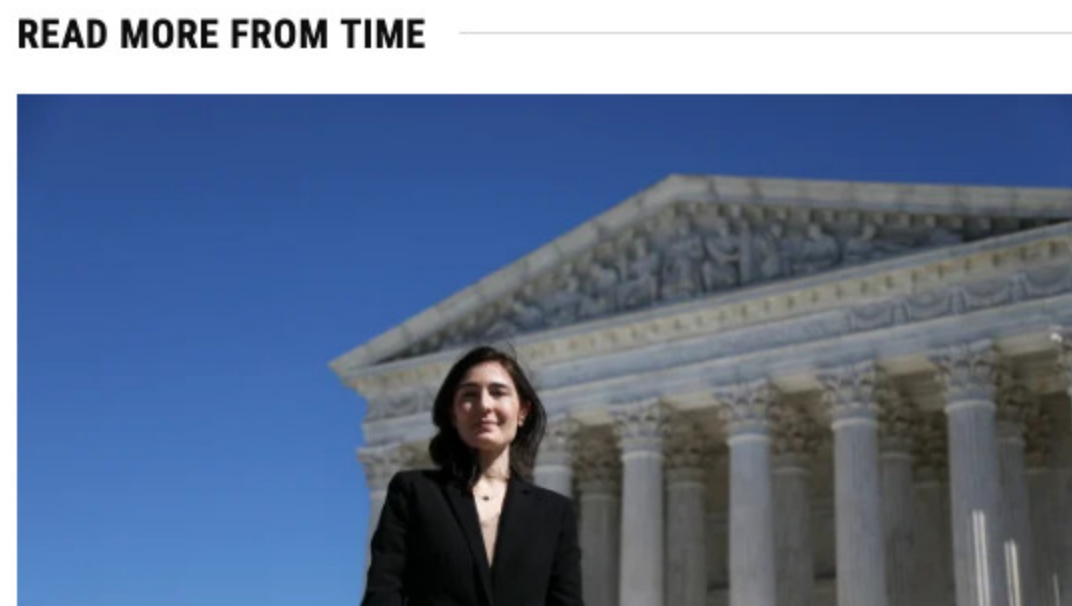


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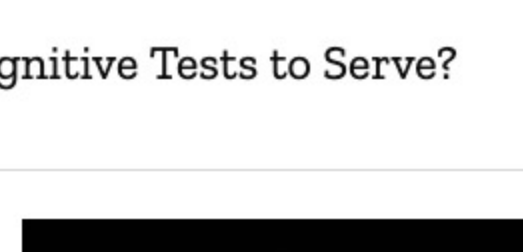
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