Is Facebook taking over our lives? And if it is, so what? In email interviews with new media researcher and user control advocate Marc Stemple who is conducting a Facebook Resistance workshop this fortnight, and artist and communication designer Tobias Leinruber, the originator of the FB Resistance idea, Akhil Seetharaman attempts to answer these questions.

There’s a lot said about the role of social media in fuelling political revolutions. What do you make of the role of Facebook, for instance, in the recent uprisings in the Arab world?

Marc Stemple: Clearly, social media has been utilised as instruments by citizens in the Middle East to organise and coordinate democratic protests. They have also proven to be important sources for real-time reporting and documenting political events. The use of networked communication in political protests, however, is nothing new. In my view, it’s wrong to assume there is a causal relationship between social media and “political revolutions”. You need “the people” to instigate a revolution; they will unquestionably use any media at hand.

My interest lies more with researching and exposing the political dimension of social media, rather than questioning its relationship with the politics that we are used to talking and writing about. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter are sites of governance themselves, as the user activities, conditions and data distribution are maintained by a particular set of rules and constraints, embedded in the software.

How do social media sites control people, while at the same time giving them more outlets for self expression and communication?

Marc Stemple: Proprietary social networking software like Facebook have many constraints, which means that users have to abide by the laws and strict limits as defined by the software. Where is our ‘freedom’? For example, why not let the users change their background colour or ‘dislike’ something?

There have been many changes to Facebook that have met with widespread opposition and outrage. How does one make sense of these instances?

Marc Stemple: Facebook’s PR communication regarding its immediate software changes has been very deceptive. They’ve repeatedly used a particular vocabulary to create images of Facebook ‘apologising’ for or ‘justifying’ rigid changes. They say, ‘Look! We’ve simplified privacy controls, because we care about your privacy,’ while making them more complex instead.

Can you tell us a few things that Facebook users should know but don’t, about the way Facebook uses their stuff?

Tobias Leinruber: Realise the nature of the company. Google is not a search engine. Google is an advertising network. Facebook is not a social network – it’s an advertising network. We are the product, ‘the sheeples’. We get to be in a herd, but we pay with our most private data. They shave our wool.

MS Facebook is not transparent about its Web user-tracking activities. Via cookies it saves every website you visit outside of Facebook that has any FB social plugin implemented. We don’t exactly know what FB does with this tracking data.

What is the Facebook Resistance?

Marc Stemple: Our attempt is to resist from within the system by slowly undermining and questioning it. This means we’re not leaving it and building a new one. We’re accepting the fact that Facebook has already won, not for now, and we’re trying to make the best out of it by bending its rules.

Critical talk about social media landscape often borrows from the lexicon of war – with online suicide, tactical media, resistance, etc. How much of a warzone is it?

TL: Nice observation! Actually ‘cyberwar’ has become very real this year, as US and Israeli militaries created a worm that successfully attacked and physically destroyed parts of the Iranian nuclear research programme. But more specifically on social media, I think those extreme terms are very helpful to get people’s attention. We’re overwhelmed by information, so getting people’s attention is an art form itself. MS We are not at ‘war’ with Facebook; we are at “softer”, fighting for internet freedom and the adoption of open standards.

What is the potential of resistance to Facebook? What can be achieved?

TL: In theory we could undermine and replace their entire system. For example, the chat – to get rid of the tracking and censorship, the system behind Facebook’s chat interface could be replaced with something else, such as the Jabber protocol through an independent server.

MS: Expanding your freedom on Facebook by learning how to impose new rules and features onto the system through internet browser processing (thus, not changing any code on Facebook’s server) and spreading awareness about this possibility.

See Sat Apr 2 in Events.
**Events**

How to use this section

Listings are updated by date and then by type of event. These listings are accurate at the time of going to print but please check on the website or phone to confirm the details in case of changes.

* denotes agenda pick.

If you want to be listed

Submit information by mail (Time Out, 41 East House, Old Lakshmi Theater Building, St John’s Road, Bangalore 560 042) email (distinginfotimeouts@bhel.com) or fax (2299-8502) to Abhi Seetharaman, Include details of event, date, time, address, and if the event is free or paid. Listings are also published in the market, and rework for more given the wide user base, there’s good reason for developers to show up at a day-long camp on the topic.

To register and for details about venue visit www.androidcamp.in. ₹500.

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**Sat Apr 2**

**FREE Workshop on Facebook Resistances**

According to artist Tobihas Luigener, Facebook allows you to design online identities just like IKEA allows you to design your own apartment. By using free online networks let users modify their online profiles completely, social networking sites have created "the world’s biggest social movement" into commercially valuable structures, according to user-control advocate Marc Stempel. Through this workshop, Stempel will help you become a "browser hacker" and think outside of Facebook’s existing rules and limitations.

As users of technology we have endless choices but don’t have the freedom to go against laws and rules of the systems we operate in, said Stempel. Facebook Resistance is a research initiative that tries to generate creative ideas, which can be possibly converted into real software development. The workshop is open every day.

**Fri Apr 8**

**Bangalore Weekend of Photography Day 2**

The weekend expanding your knowledge about photography at a series of photo-related events geared towards amateurs, artists and professionals alike. Web development or Photoshop skills would be useful, but no prior knowledge is necessary. Email by sending mail@digitalnatives.cis-india.org. For any questions at [digitalnatives.cis.india.org](http://digitalnatives.cis.india.org).

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**Sun Apr 3**

**FREE Ubuntu Global Jam**

The spotlight is on the free community-developed Linux-based operating system, Ubuntu. Named after the African philosophy of shared humanity, the operating system, which has been described as “Linux for human beings”, has all the main features such as a web browser, applications for presentations, spreadsheets and text documents, as well as light messaging. Ubuntu is available for free and can be downloaded from www.ubuntu.com. This fortnight, members of the Ubuntu community come together to improve the operating system.

16/1, Rhodes Street, off Richmond Road, Shanti Nagar. For details visit www.ubuntu-in.info. 4-5pm.

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**Tue Apr 5**

**FREE Recent nuclear disaster in Japan and lessons for India**

Nuclear energy expert MR Srivinasa, former head of the Atomic Energy Commission of India, who was among the scientists and engineers chosen by Homi Bhabha to build India’s nuclear reactor and who went on to play a role in establishing fast breeder reactors for energy production, will talk to the Power Projects division, helping make sense of the nuclear disaster in Japan. He has also been a member of the Planning Commission for energy and is currently a member of the National Security Advisory Board. Srivinasa addresses the many questions raised by this crisis and talks about the lessons for India in terms of safety measures in the event of an emergency.

Bangalore International Centre, TEBI Complex, 4th Main, 2nd Cross, Domlur 2nd Stage. For details call 98865-99675. 6:30pm.

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**Wed Apr 6**

**The Red Bull Chris Fuchs Street Tour 2011**

If you missed seeing him burn rubber last year when he visited the city, here’s your chance to make up for it. Motorcycle stunt riding champion performs in Bangalore as part of a ten-city India tour on his BMW F 800 R and Beta Evo 300 GT.

For details of venue and time visit www.redbull.in. Palace Grounds, 4-6pm.

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**Sun Apr 10**

**Bangalore Weekend of Photography Day 3**

Pioneering Indian wildlife photographer TN Perumal talks about the role of wildlife photography in promoting awareness about nature and creating an attitude of conservation at Jaaga in the Indian wild.

**Thu Apr 12**

**IPL 2011 Mumbai Indians vs Royal Challengers**

The fourth edition of IPL runs from Fri Apr 8 to Sat May 28. One of the biggest tournaments in the world, IPL T20 will feature 74 matches played across the country. If you’re a fan, don’t miss the chance to root for the home team on home turf at the stadium’s first match in the city.

For details on how to get tickets visit www.ipltickets.net. Chinnaswamy Stadium, Cubbon Road. 2.30pm.