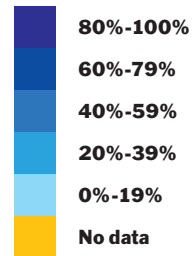


The Global Network

Facebook has conquered America. Can it take over the world?

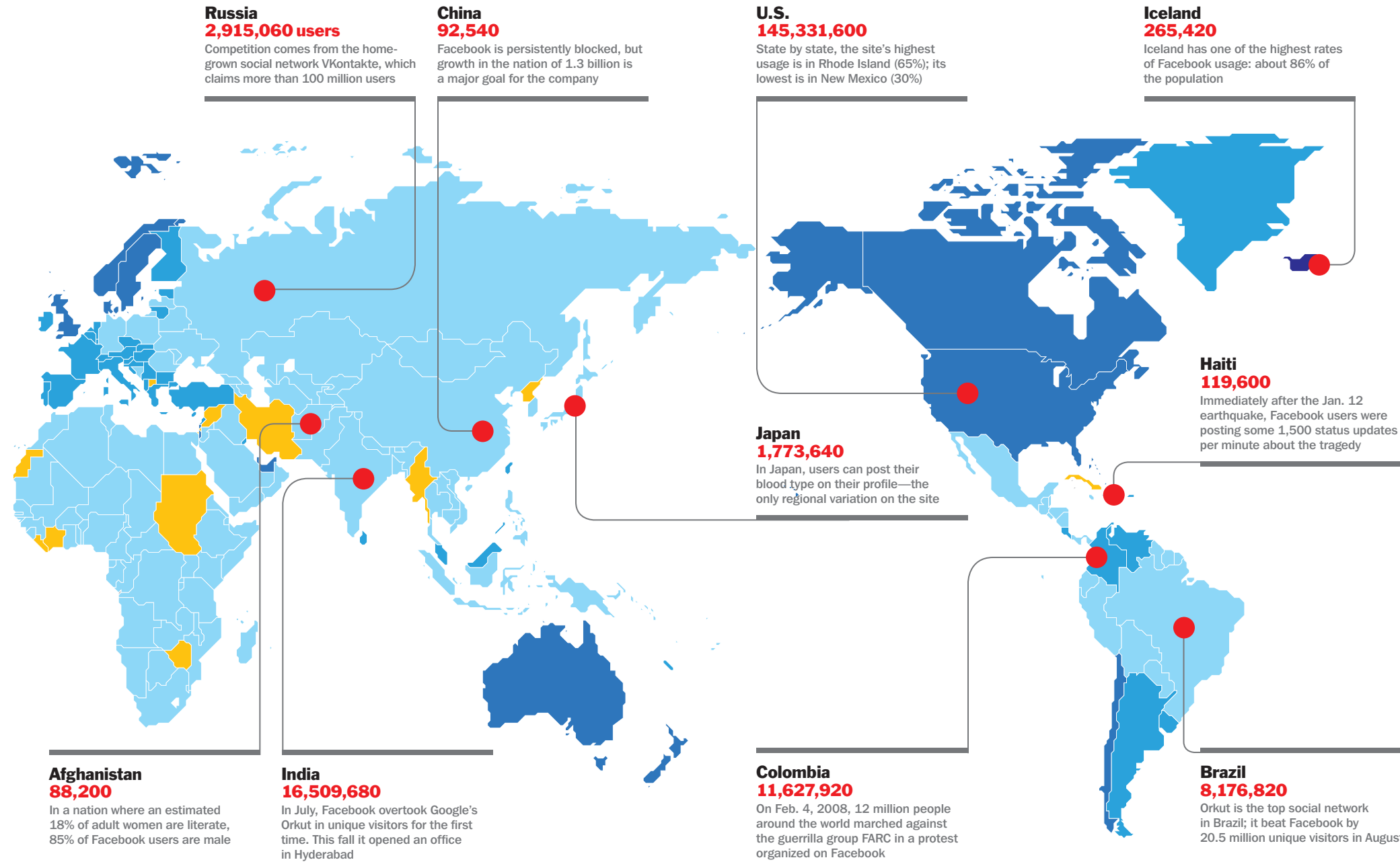
By Andréa Ford

Active Users



Sources: Facebook; CIA World Factbook. Calculations are based on advertising reach estimates from Dec. 3-6

Graphics by Carl DeTorres for TIME



Poking Without Borders

HOW DO YOU POKE FACEBOOK friends in Russian? You don't. You wink at them.

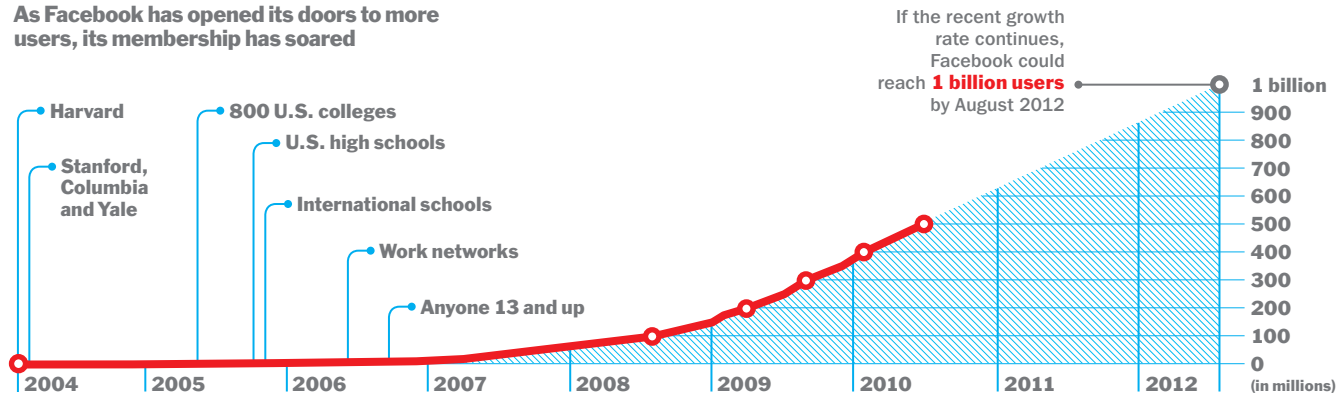
Facebook is operative in more than 75 languages worldwide—a mammoth translation job, but not for the company's employees. Removing the English barrier—a key to the site's global expansion—was “a community-driven process,” says Naomi Gleit, Facebook's product manager for growth and internationalization. “What we did was build a technology that actually allowed users to translate Facebook.” This translation app enabled users to click on words in the site's account settings, submit translations for them, then vote on a winner.

“Poking” proved a particular challenge. Its function on the site is ambiguous even in English: Is it an act of affection, flirtation or frustration, or just a friendly call for attention? And if it's all those things, then culturally speaking, what's the right gesture in Chinese? (Apparently it's “call.”) Latin? (“Puncture.”) Urdu? (“Make a sound.”)

“The irony is, I don't speak any other languages,” says Gleit. Luckily, Facebook has a lot of friends who do.

The March to a Billion

As Facebook has opened its doors to more users, its membership has soared



Friends of All Ages

The site now attracts sizable chunks of both young and middle-aged users

