The latest threat to the Internet?

SOUTHAMPTON, UK: Tim Berners-Lee*, the man to thank for inventing the worldwide web, has spoken out about social networks and the danger they pose to internet usage. He reckons social networks are a 'threat to the web'.

Now you would think that Berners-Lee would advocate any platform that made it easier for people to interact with the internet - he once apologised for including the "unnecessary" forward slashes in web addresses at the birth of the web - but the father of the internet has recently announced that social networks are a "threat to the web".

Berners-Lee's beef is essentially about the way social network sites encourage the compartmentalising of data across the internet in a series of "walled garden" environments. As this practice becomes more widespread, he argues that this will lead to a fragmented web - a far cry from the "single universal information space" he originally envisaged.

He also highlighted the habit of social network sites to solicit information from members, and then remove control over how that information is put to use.

Probably not signing up

These comments come just a few weeks after Facebook Messages was announced by Mark Zuckerberg, a service that would unite Facebook members' communications - text, email and direct messaging - into one place, which perfectly illustrates Tim's point about the silo of information.

The actual need that Facebook Messages fulfils for its users is still debatable (personally I like getting SMS messages to my phone and emails to my inbox)- although no doubt for some people, Facebook will soon become their main platform for their web experiences. Assuming it has not already. I am guessing Tim Berners-Lee will not be signing up.

*A graduate of Oxford University, Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web, an internet-based hypermedia initiative for global information sharing while at CERN, the European Particle Physics Laboratory, in 1989. He wrote the first web client and server in 1990. His specifications of URIs, HTTP and HTML were refined as Web technology spread.

He is the 3Com Founders Professor of Engineering in the School of Engineering with a joint appointment in the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at the Laboratory for Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence (CSAIL) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) where he also heads the Decentralized Information Group (DIG). He is also a Professor in the Electronics and Computer Science Department at the University of Southampton, UK.