

College of the Holy Cross

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Advisor: Karen Teitel, Associate Professor
Topic: Facebook: The New Drug
Division: Undergraduate
Audience: Facebook Executive Team

Executive Summary

We propose the implementation of a modified Facebook/Instagram platform for adolescent users. The age group we are targeting is 13-18 year old adolescents. The modified mode, Facebook/Instagram Lite, removes access to likes, hashtags, reels and user targeted ads in order to recreate the safe, fun and connection driven social platforms that Facebook, Inc. created.

These changes are necessary to address the negative implications the current user interface has on adolescent mental health. Due to a mismatch in the development of the adolescent brain, adolescents are left vulnerable and susceptible to the negative peer effects driven by social media. Additionally, positive peer reinforcement from “likes” on an Instagram photo causes a neurological response in the brain that becomes addictive. As a social media company, we have an obligation to look after our most vulnerable users. It would be unethical to continue offering full access to Instagram and Facebook platforms to young users knowing the negative psychological implications and mental health effects.

We anticipate that, in the short term, Facebook and Instagram may lose some subscribers. However, it is more important to take a long term perspective. Facebook is the social media industry leader and should take the lead in changing social media to be safer for adolescents. This will rebuild trust and improve our reputation with users and investors. Being proactive and addressing the issues related to adolescent mental health will also decrease the likelihood of additional litigation. We propose that general, age appropriate ads replace targeted ads in Instagram and Facebook Lite. This may attract new advertisers because they would be ensured that their ads would go to all users in their target age group.

We acknowledge that to differentiate the age group user is necessary in our practice. The proposed launch of Facebook/Instagram Lite mode would start in the United States and then roll-out to other countries. The new registration platform allows us to identify those who are adolescents through our mutual collaboration with the public department. We also welcome users to upload any acceptable sources of their age proof. Meanwhile, privacy and security are our first priority. All information sent to our system will be encrypted and will be deleted once the verification is complete. Users within the designated 13 to 18 years age group will then be directed to our Lite mode. This means certain features will be temporarily disabled and hidden. Once they become a legal adult, they will be able to opt into the full platform.