

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5051
MINORITY (202) 225-5074
<https://oversight.house.gov>

September 20, 2021

Mr. Mark Zuckerberg
Chief Executive Officer
Facebook, Inc.
1 Hacker Way
Menlo Park, CA 94025

Dear Mr. Zuckerberg:

The Subcommittee on Economic and Consumer Policy is writing to request documents and information about concerning reports of Facebook's apparent failure to protect the welfare of its users, particularly women and girls. I am concerned by reports that: (1) Facebook has allowed its platform to be used for human trafficking and other illegal activity; and (2) Facebook has known of and disregarded Instagram's detrimental effects on the mental health of teen girls.

Facebook's Facilitation of Human Trafficking

The *Wall Street Journal* recently reported that Facebook has knowingly allowed sex trafficking and other illicit content to pervade its platform, despite such content violating Facebook's own policies. The disturbing allegations against Facebook include:

- “[H]uman traffickers in the Middle East used the site to lure women into abusive employment situations in which they were treated like slaves or forced to perform sex work”;
- Facebook has allowed its platform to be used for “organ selling, pornography and government action against political dissent”;
- Facebook has permitted users to post “videos of murders, incitements to violence, government threats against pro-democracy campaigners and advertisements for human trafficking”; and
- “[A]rmed groups in Ethiopia used the site to incite violence against ethnic minorities.”¹

¹ *Facebook Employees Flag Drug Cartels and Human Traffickers. The Company's Response Is Weak, Documents Show*, Wall Street Journal (Sept. 16, 2021) (online at www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-drug-cartels-human-traffickers-response-is-weak-documents-11631812953?mod=article_inline).

According to internal documents obtained by the *Wall Street Journal*, Facebook employees reportedly raised concerns about the dangerous uses of its platforms in both the United States and in developing countries, but Facebook took little to no action to address them.²

The documents reveal that Facebook and Instagram have allowed human traffickers in the Middle East to continue engaging in unscrupulous practices, including advertising the sale of women who are supplied to buyers under coercive terms, forcing them into “situations akin to slavery.” A 2021 Facebook document reportedly cautioned that Facebook should use a “light touch with Arabic-language warnings about human trafficking so as not to ‘alienate buyers.’”³

While human exploitation and other abuses appear to occur both in the United States and abroad, Facebook allegedly ignores these problems in developing countries where Facebook is the primary mode of communication and source of news and where the platform is rapidly expanding. A former Facebook executive has alleged that Facebook treats the harms that occur in such countries “as simply the cost of doing business.”⁴ It would be troubling if an American company attempted to pad its profits through rapid expansion in lower-income countries without instituting the same safety measures it employs here and in other wealthy nations.

Instagram’s Negative Effects on Mental Health of Teen Girls

I am also disturbed by Facebook and Instagram’s alleged knowledge and disregard of Instagram’s negative effects on the mental health of teen girls. I am even more troubled that, despite knowledge of Instagram’s harmful outcomes, Facebook still appears to be moving ahead with plans to expand its platform to kids younger than 13 years old by creating an Instagram for kids.

On September 14, 2021, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Instagram, which was purchased by Facebook in 2012, has been studying the negative effects of its platform on teen girls since at least 2019. According to the report, internal Instagram documents revealed that Instagram can compound damage to teens already suffering from body image issues. In a 2019 internal presentation, Instagram employees noted, “We make body image issues worse for one in three teen girls.” Another slide in the same presentation stated that “teens blame Instagram for increases in the rate of anxiety and depression.” Other internal documents reportedly show a link between suicidal ideation and Instagram.⁵

According to this reporting, internal studies conducted by Facebook found that a quarter of teens in the United States and United Kingdom began feeling like they were “not good

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Facebook Knows Instagram Is Toxic for Teen Girls, Company Documents Show*, Wall Street Journal (Sept. 14, 2021) (online at www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-knows-instagram-is-toxic-for-teen-girls-company-documents-show-11631620739?mod=searchresults_pos10&page=1).

enough” only after using Instagram. Further, Facebook’s own research confirms that Instagram can be addictive to those that it is harming most.⁶

I am deeply concerned by reports that Facebook has intentionally buried these internal studies while failing to fix the problem. According to reports, in May 2021, the head of Instagram downplayed the results of Facebook’s research, stating that Instagram’s effects on the mental health of teens is likely “quite small.”⁷ The findings appear to have been widely known within Facebook and Instagram, including by yourself and other top executives.⁸

At a time when Facebook needs to do more to protect Instagram’s teen users, it is simply irresponsible to expand the platform to our most vulnerable—children under the age of 13. I urge you to address the harm caused by Instagram and discontinue your plans to create an Instagram for kids.

To assist the Subcommittee in its review of these matters, by October 4, 2021, please provide the following documents from January 1, 2016, to the present:

1. All documents and communications regarding suspected or actual human trafficking on Facebook or Instagram, including all complaints raised or concerns received regarding the use of the platforms for human trafficking. Please redact all personally identifiable information related to trafficking victims;
2. For each country in which Facebook is available to users, the number of personnel responsible for monitoring and/or addressing harmful and/or illegal content on the platform in that country, and the languages in which each individual is native or proficient;
3. Documents sufficient to show Facebook’s list of “at-risk countries,” and the criteria for inclusion on such list;
4. All communications between Facebook and the government of any “at-risk country” or country that is designated by the United Nations as a “developing economy” regarding Facebook’s content moderation, and all documents related thereto;
5. All documents and communications regarding the findings and recommendations of Facebook and/or Instagram research or investigation teams focused on “at-risk countries” and human trafficking or other illicit activity;
6. All documents and communications regarding the disabling of any tools or systems for detecting human trafficking, including the Civic Integrity Detection pipeline;

⁶ *Id.*

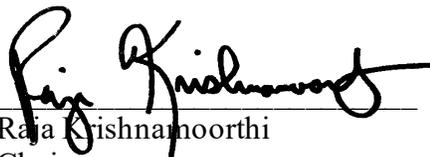
⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

7. All documents, including research, studies, reports, and analyses, on Instagram and mental health, including on body image issues, “negative social comparison,” depression, addiction, and suicidal ideation;
8. All documents and communications regarding Facebook’s and/or Instagram’s “teen mental health deep dive”;
9. All presentations prepared for Facebook and/or Instagram employees that include information about Instagram and mental health, including the dates of the presentations and the names and titles of employees who received them;
10. All complaints raised or concerns received by Facebook and/or Instagram, including those raised by employees, regarding the negative mental health effects of Instagram, and all documents relating to such complaints or concerns;
11. All documents and communications regarding whether Facebook and/or Instagram should institute a cap on the maximum amount of time per day a person can use Instagram;
12. All documents and communications regarding mental health and kids under the age of 13, including documents and communications related to the development of Instagram for kids; and
13. A written statement indicating whether you will commit to not introducing any version of Instagram for kids.

The Committee on Oversight and Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. An attachment to this letter provides additional instructions for responding to the Committee’s request. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Subcommittee staff at (202) 225-5051.

Sincerely,



Raja Krishnamoorthi
Chairman

Subcommittee on Economic and Consumer Policy

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Michael Cloud, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Economic and Consumer Policy

Responding to Oversight Committee Document Requests

1. In complying with this request, produce all responsive documents that are in your possession, custody, or control, whether held by you or your past or present agents, employees, and representatives acting on your behalf. Produce all documents that you have a legal right to obtain, that you have a right to copy, or to which you have access, as well as documents that you have placed in the temporary possession, custody, or control of any third party.
2. Requested documents, and all documents reasonably related to the requested documents, should not be destroyed, altered, removed, transferred, or otherwise made inaccessible to the Committee.
3. In the event that any entity, organization, or individual denoted in this request is or has been known by any name other than that herein denoted, the request shall be read also to include that alternative identification.
4. The Committee's preference is to receive documents in electronic form (i.e., CD, memory stick, thumb drive, or secure file transfer) in lieu of paper productions.
5. Documents produced in electronic format should be organized, identified, and indexed electronically.
6. Electronic document productions should be prepared according to the following standards:
 - a. The production should consist of single page Tagged Image File ("TIF"), files accompanied by a Concordance-format load file, an Opticon reference file, and a file defining the fields and character lengths of the load file.
 - b. Document numbers in the load file should match document Bates numbers and TIF file names.
 - c. If the production is completed through a series of multiple partial productions, field names and file order in all load files should match.
 - d. All electronic documents produced to the Committee should include the following fields of metadata specific to each document, and no modifications should be made to the original metadata:

BEGDOC, ENDDOC, TEXT, BEGATTACH, ENDATTACH, PAGECOUNT, CUSTODIAN, RECORDTYPE, DATE, TIME, SENTDATE, SENTTIME, BEGINDATE, BEGINTIME, ENDDATE, ENDTIME, AUTHOR, FROM, CC, TO, BCC, SUBJECT, TITLE, FILENAME, FILEEXT, FILESIZE, DATECREATED, TIMECREATED, DATELASTMOD, TIMELASTMOD,

INTMSGID, INTMSGHEADER, NATIVELINK, INTFILPATH, EXCEPTION,
BEGATTACH.

7. Documents produced to the Committee should include an index describing the contents of the production. To the extent more than one CD, hard drive, memory stick, thumb drive, zip file, box, or folder is produced, each should contain an index describing its contents.
8. Documents produced in response to this request shall be produced together with copies of file labels, dividers, or identifying markers with which they were associated when the request was served.
9. When you produce documents, you should identify the paragraph(s) or request(s) in the Committee's letter to which the documents respond.
10. The fact that any other person or entity also possesses non-identical or identical copies of the same documents shall not be a basis to withhold any information.
11. The pendency of or potential for litigation shall not be a basis to withhold any information.
12. In accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 552(d), the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and any statutory exemptions to FOIA shall not be a basis for withholding any information.
13. Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552a(b)(9), the Privacy Act shall not be a basis for withholding information.
14. If compliance with the request cannot be made in full by the specified return date, compliance shall be made to the extent possible by that date. An explanation of why full compliance is not possible shall be provided along with any partial production.
15. In the event that a document is withheld on the basis of privilege, provide a privilege log containing the following information concerning any such document: (a) every privilege asserted; (b) the type of document; (c) the general subject matter; (d) the date, author, addressee, and any other recipient(s); (e) the relationship of the author and addressee to each other; and (f) the basis for the privilege(s) asserted.
16. If any document responsive to this request was, but no longer is, in your possession, custody, or control, identify the document (by date, author, subject, and recipients), and explain the circumstances under which the document ceased to be in your possession, custody, or control.
17. If a date or other descriptive detail set forth in this request referring to a document is inaccurate, but the actual date or other descriptive detail is known to you or is otherwise apparent from the context of the request, produce all documents that would be responsive as if the date or other descriptive detail were correct.

18. This request is continuing in nature and applies to any newly-discovered information. Any record, document, compilation of data, or information not produced because it has not been located or discovered by the return date shall be produced immediately upon subsequent location or discovery.
19. All documents shall be Bates-stamped sequentially and produced sequentially.
20. Two sets of each production shall be delivered, one set to the Majority Staff and one set to the Minority Staff. When documents are produced to the Committee, production sets shall be delivered to the Majority Staff in Room 2157 of the Rayburn House Office Building and the Minority Staff in Room 2105 of the Rayburn House Office Building.
21. Upon completion of the production, submit a written certification, signed by you or your counsel, stating that: (1) a diligent search has been completed of all documents in your possession, custody, or control that reasonably could contain responsive documents; and (2) all documents located during the search that are responsive have been produced to the Committee.

Definitions

1. The term “document” means any written, recorded, or graphic matter of any nature whatsoever, regardless of how recorded, and whether original or copy, including, but not limited to, the following: memoranda, reports, expense reports, books, manuals, instructions, financial reports, data, working papers, records, notes, letters, notices, confirmations, telegrams, receipts, appraisals, pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, prospectuses, communications, electronic mail (email), contracts, cables, notations of any type of conversation, telephone call, meeting or other inter-office or intra-office communication, bulletins, printed matter, computer printouts, teletypes, invoices, transcripts, diaries, analyses, returns, summaries, minutes, bills, accounts, estimates, projections, comparisons, messages, correspondence, press releases, circulars, financial statements, reviews, opinions, offers, studies and investigations, questionnaires and surveys, and work sheets (and all drafts, preliminary versions, alterations, modifications, revisions, changes, and amendments of any of the foregoing, as well as any attachments or appendices thereto), and graphic or oral records or representations of any kind (including without limitation, photographs, charts, graphs, microfiche, microfilm, videotape, recordings and motion pictures), and electronic, mechanical, and electric records or representations of any kind (including, without limitation, tapes, cassettes, disks, and recordings) and other written, printed, typed, or other graphic or recorded matter of any kind or nature, however produced or reproduced, and whether preserved in writing, film, tape, disk, videotape, or otherwise. A document bearing any notation not a part of the original text is to be considered a separate document. A draft or non-identical copy is a separate document within the meaning of this term.
2. The term “communication” means each manner or means of disclosure or exchange of information, regardless of means utilized, whether oral, electronic, by document or otherwise, and whether in a meeting, by telephone, facsimile, mail, releases, electronic

message including email (desktop or mobile device), text message, instant message, MMS or SMS message, message application, or otherwise.

3. The terms “and” and “or” shall be construed broadly and either conjunctively or disjunctively to bring within the scope of this request any information that might otherwise be construed to be outside its scope. The singular includes plural number, and vice versa. The masculine includes the feminine and neutral genders.
4. The term “including” shall be construed broadly to mean “including, but not limited to.”
5. The term “Company” means the named legal entity as well as any units, firms, partnerships, associations, corporations, limited liability companies, trusts, subsidiaries, affiliates, divisions, departments, branches, joint ventures, proprietorships, syndicates, or other legal, business or government entities over which the named legal entity exercises control or in which the named entity has any ownership whatsoever.
6. The term “identify,” when used in a question about individuals, means to provide the following information: (a) the individual’s complete name and title; (b) the individual’s business or personal address and phone number; and (c) any and all known aliases.
7. The term “related to” or “referring or relating to,” with respect to any given subject, means anything that constitutes, contains, embodies, reflects, identifies, states, refers to, deals with, or is pertinent to that subject in any manner whatsoever.
8. The term “employee” means any past or present agent, borrowed employee, casual employee, consultant, contractor, de facto employee, detailee, fellow, independent contractor, intern, joint adventurer, loaned employee, officer, part-time employee, permanent employee, provisional employee, special government employee, subcontractor, or any other type of service provider.
9. The term “individual” means all natural persons and all persons or entities acting on their behalf.