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Combating Social Media's Negative Effects on School Districts and Student Success

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Summary

- The Youth Mental Health Crisis
- Social Media Designed to Addict Our Children
- Why? The Social Media Business Model
- The Unfair Burden Our Schools Have Assumed to Help Our Children
- Holding Social Media Companies Accountable



KEY FINDINGS FOR

MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDAL THOUGHTS AND BEHAVIORS

IN 2023

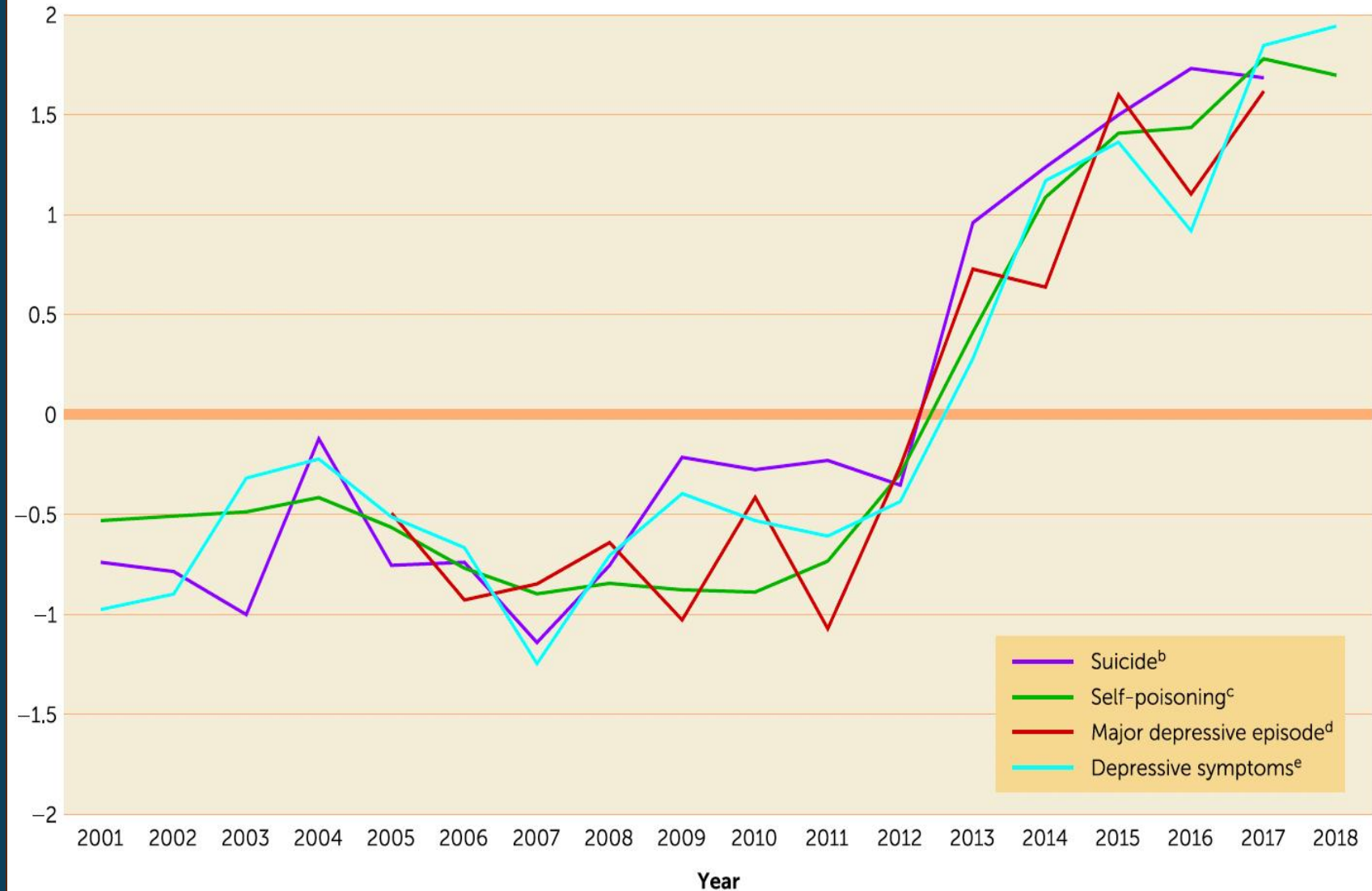
4 in 10 high school students experienced **persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness.**

2 in 10 students **seriously considered attempting suicide** and almost **1 in 10** students **attempted suicide.**

Social Media Harms

Especially hard on U.S. Girls

- **146%** suicide increase
- **40%** increase feeling of hopelessness
- **36%** increase suicidal ideation
- **28%** Psychiatric ER visits



Indicators of Poor Mental Health Among U.S. Girls 2001–2018



Social Media Addiction

A Growing Concern in Medical Community

<https://www.addictioncenter.com/drugs/social-media-addiction/>

Addiction Traits

Social media addiction involves an uncontrollable urge to use these platforms, leading to significant impairment in important life areas.

Psychologists estimate

5 to 10%

Americans meet the criteria for social media addiction today.

A longitudinal cohort study of U.S. adolescents aged 12–15 (n=6,595) that adjusted for baseline mental health status found that adolescents who spent more than 3 hours per day on social media faced double the risk of experiencing poor mental health outcomes including symptoms of depression and anxiety.

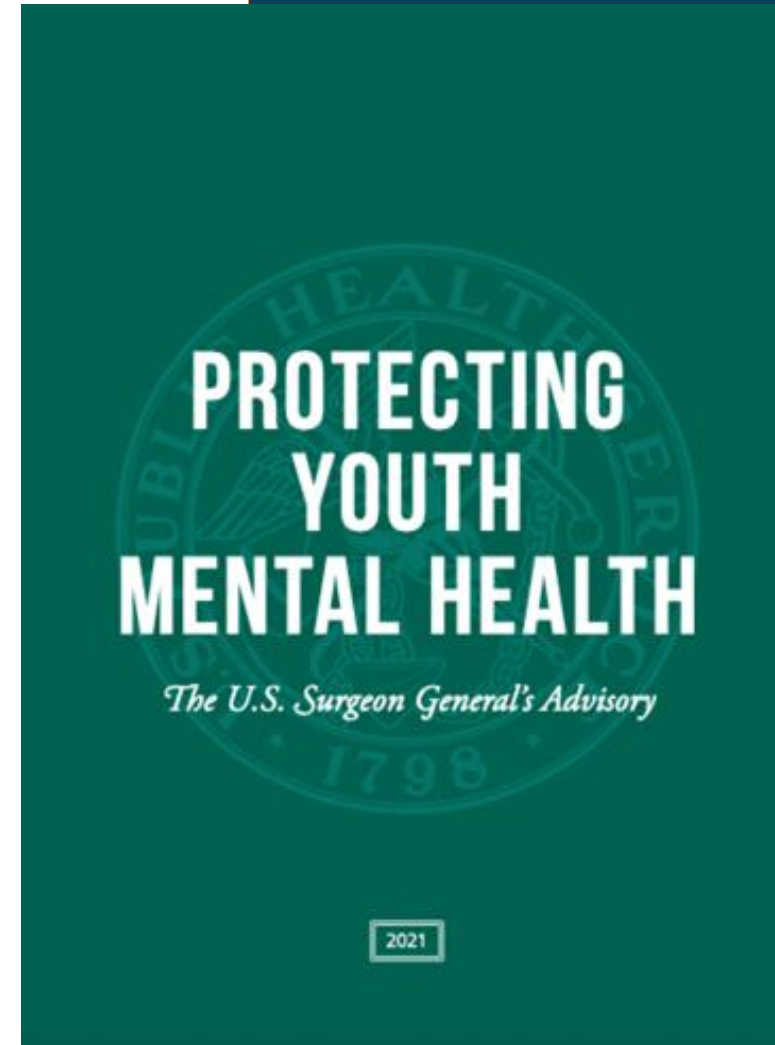
>3 hours per day = doubling of the risk



U.S. Surgeon General Advisory Opinion

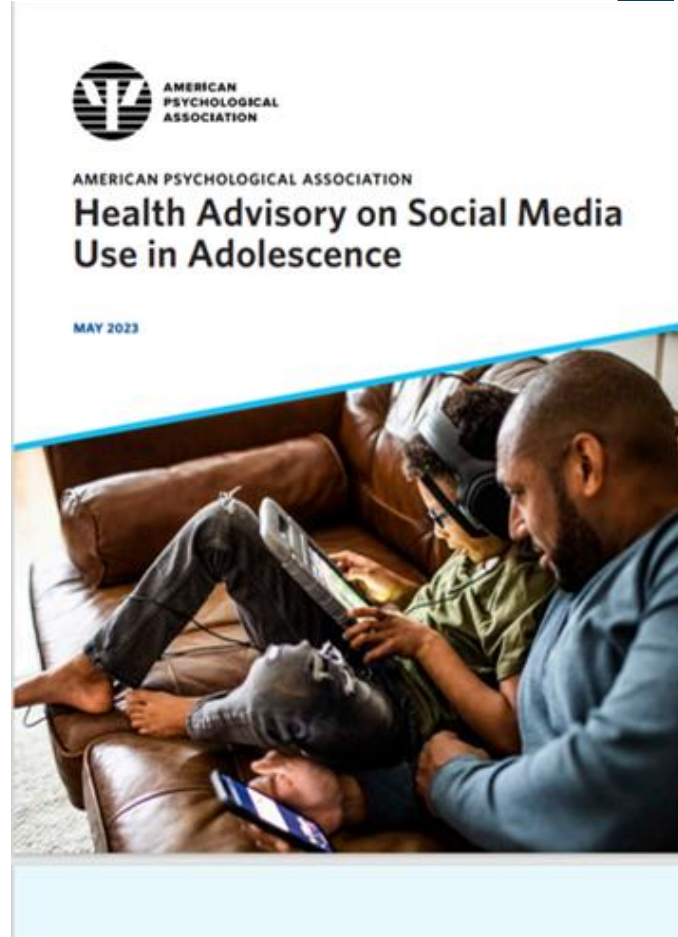
“In these digital public spaces, which [are] privately owned and tend to be run for profit, there can be tension between what’s best for the technology company and what’s best for the individual user or for society.

Business models are often built around maximizing user engagement as opposed to safeguarding users’ health and ensuring that users engage with one another in safe and healthy ways.”



American Psychological Association 2023

Minimize adolescents' exposure to harmful content and online discrimination to safeguard their mental health.



RECOMMENDATIONS *(continued)*

To reduce the risks of psychological harm, adolescents' exposure to content on social media that depicts illegal or psychologically maladaptive behavior, including content that instructs or encourages youth to engage in health-risk behaviors, such as self-harm (e.g., cutting, suicide), harm to others, or those that encourage eating-disordered behavior (e.g., restrictive eating, purging, excessive exercise) should be minimized, reported, and removed²³; moreover, technology should not drive users to this content.

- Evidence suggests that exposure to maladaptive behavior may promote similar behavior among vulnerable youth, and online social reinforcement of these behaviors may be related to increased risk for serious psychological symptoms, even after controlling for offline influences.²⁴
- Reporting structures should be created to easily identify harmful content, and ensure it is deprioritized or removed.

To minimize psychological harm, adolescents' exposure to "cyberhate" including online discrimination, prejudice, hate, or cyberbullying especially directed toward a marginalized group (e.g., racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, religious, ability status),²² or toward an individual because of their identity or allyship with a marginalized group should be minimized.

- Research demonstrates that adolescents' exposure to online discrimination and hate predicts increases in anxiety and depressive symptoms, even after controlling for how much adolescents are exposed to similar experiences offline.²⁵ Similarly, research indicates that as compared to offline bullying, online bullying and harassment can be more severe, and thus damaging to psychological development.^{26,27,28} In other words, both online cyberhate and offline bullying can increase risk for adolescent mental health problems. Research suggests elevated risks both for the perpetrators and victims of cyberhate.^{29,30}



Meta's Own Research into the Harmful Effects of Instagram on Teens Revealed:

5-6%

of 14-year-olds report 'problematic use' of Instagram ("IG"), indicative of addiction.

13.5%

of teen girls on IG say the platform makes thoughts of suicide and self injury worse

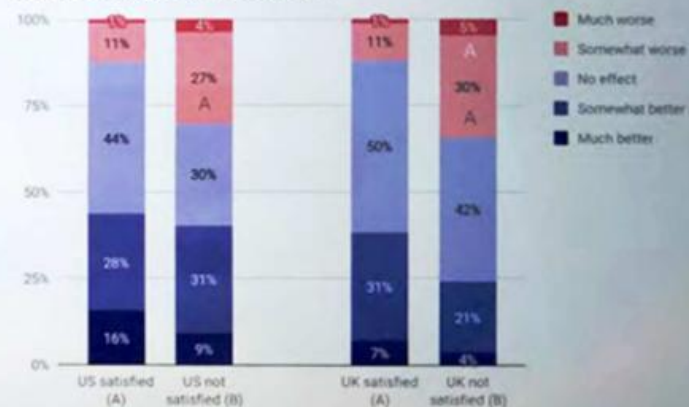
17%

of teen girls that use IG say the platform makes eating disorders worse

Teens who struggle with mental health say Instagram makes it worse

- Young people are acutely aware that Instagram can be bad for their mental health, yet are compelled to spend time on the app for fear of missing out on cultural and social trends.
- Teens specifically call out the following as ways that Instagram harms their mental health:
 - pressure to conform to social stereotypes
 - pressure to match the money and body shapes of influencers
 - the need for validation -- views, likes, followers
 - friendship conflicts, bullying, and hate speech
 - over-sexualization of girls
 - inappropriate advertisements targeted to vulnerable groups

Stated effect of Instagram



Q: In general, how has Instagram affected [the way you feel about yourself/your mental health]?

There were no statistically significant differences among those who answered for "the way you feel about yourself" and those who answered for "your mental health"
US n = 1298; UK n = 1308

LEAKED COMPANY DOCUMENT

“Teen Mental Health Deep Dive”

Teens who struggle with mental health say Instagram makes it worse

BUT, WE MAKE BODY IMAGE ISSUES WORSE FOR 1 IN 3 TEEN GIRLS

Teens also generally thought that IG made things better or had no impact. However they were also more split around problematic social media use and the role we played in it. More teen girls thought that IG made body image issues worse rather than better



LEAKED COMPANY DOCUMENT

“Teen Mental Health Deep Dive”

13.5% of teen girls on Instagram say that the platform makes thoughts of Suicide and Self Injury (SSI) worse

Social comparison creates a negative feedback loop

- As young people compare themselves to others, their feelings of self-doubt grow
- Feelings of doubt and worthlessness heighten the degree of attention they give to these feelings
- This over-focus on the negative parts of themselves leads to low mood
- Being in a low or vulnerable state of mind means teens are more vulnerable to the content they see online



"It's a vicious cycle. You see content that encourages you to criticize yourself. But I rush to judge people as well. Standards are totally based on looks."

- US Female

LEAKED COMPANY DOCUMENT

"Teen Mental Health Deep Dive"

Social comparison creates a negative feedback loop

Teens want help controlling the time they spend on the app

- Teens talk about the amount of time they spend on Instagram as one of the “worst” aspects of their relationship to the app.
- They have an addicts’ narrative about their use -- it can make them feel good, feel bad. They wish they could spend less time caring about it, but they can’t help themselves.
- Teens recognize the amount of time they spend online isn’t good for them but at the same time know they lack the willpower to control the time spent themselves



Q: Now you're going to see some things that Instagram could do to help teens. Please select your top 3 for what Instagram should do.
US n = 1296; UK n = 1308

LEAKED COMPANY DOCUMENT

“Teen Mental Health Deep Dive”

Teens want help controlling the time they spend on the app



Meta's Knowledge of Risk/Harm

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What did the Company do with all of this research about social media's impact on kids' mental health???

Answer





**Designed For
Addiction**

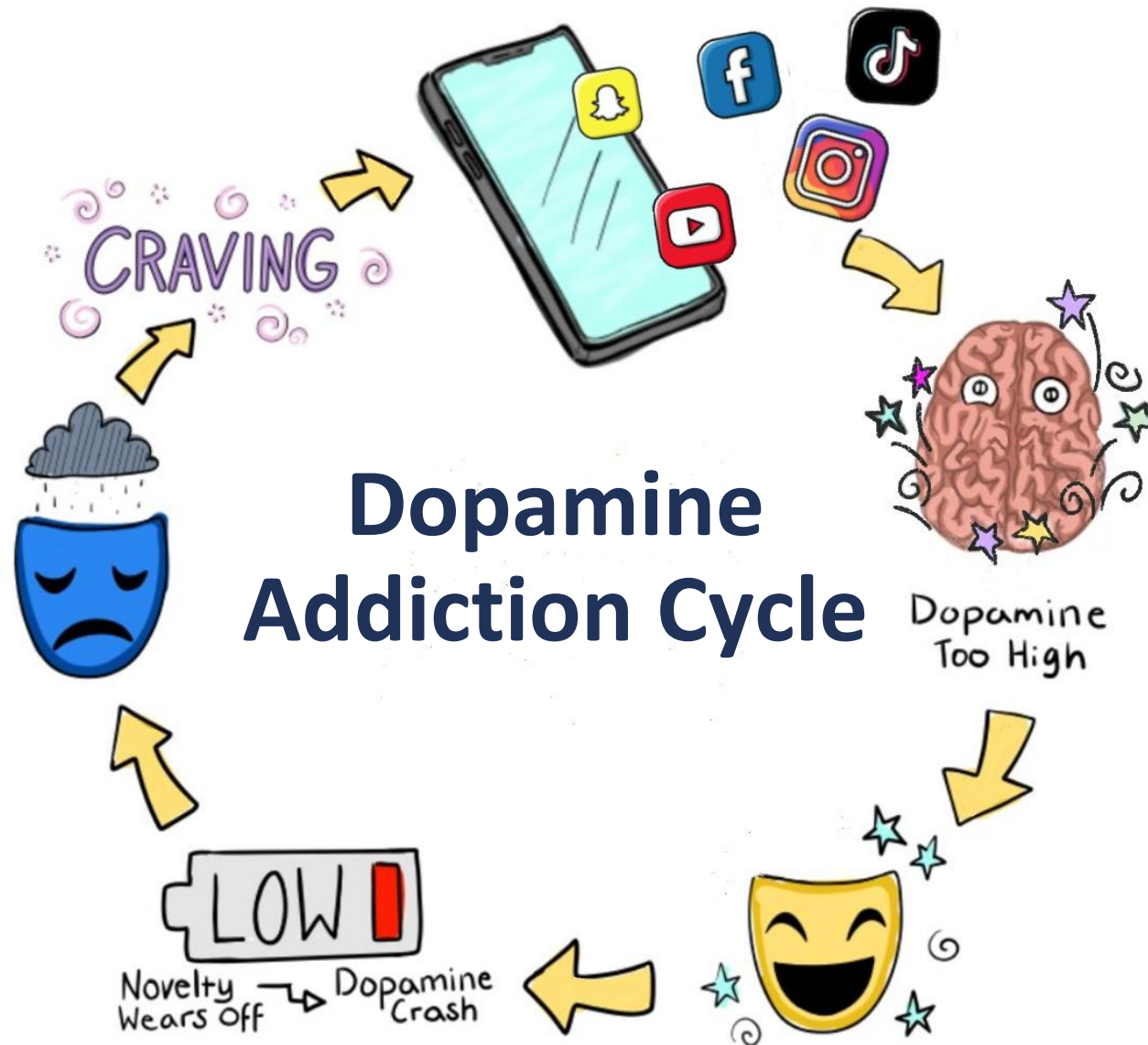


Addiction

Design features trigger intense spikes of dopamine release in kids' brains, creating a dopamine high/euphoria.

Over time, their brains adjust by reducing dopamine receptors.

Dopamine balance would typically return, but algorithms exploit the craving/urge to seek more pleasure.



Dopamine Desensitization

As this pattern continues over a period of weeks, the neurological baseline to trigger minor users' dopamine responses increases.

Minors then continue to use Social Media, not for enjoyment, but simply to feel normal.

Intermittent Variable Rewards

- An effective addiction method is fueled by spacing out dopamine triggers like likes, comments, and notifications. Allowing for craving to develop.
- Social media companies intentionally space out notifications to create anticipation, making users more hooked with each reward.
- Rather than notifying in real time, delayed notifications lure users back to see what they have “won”.

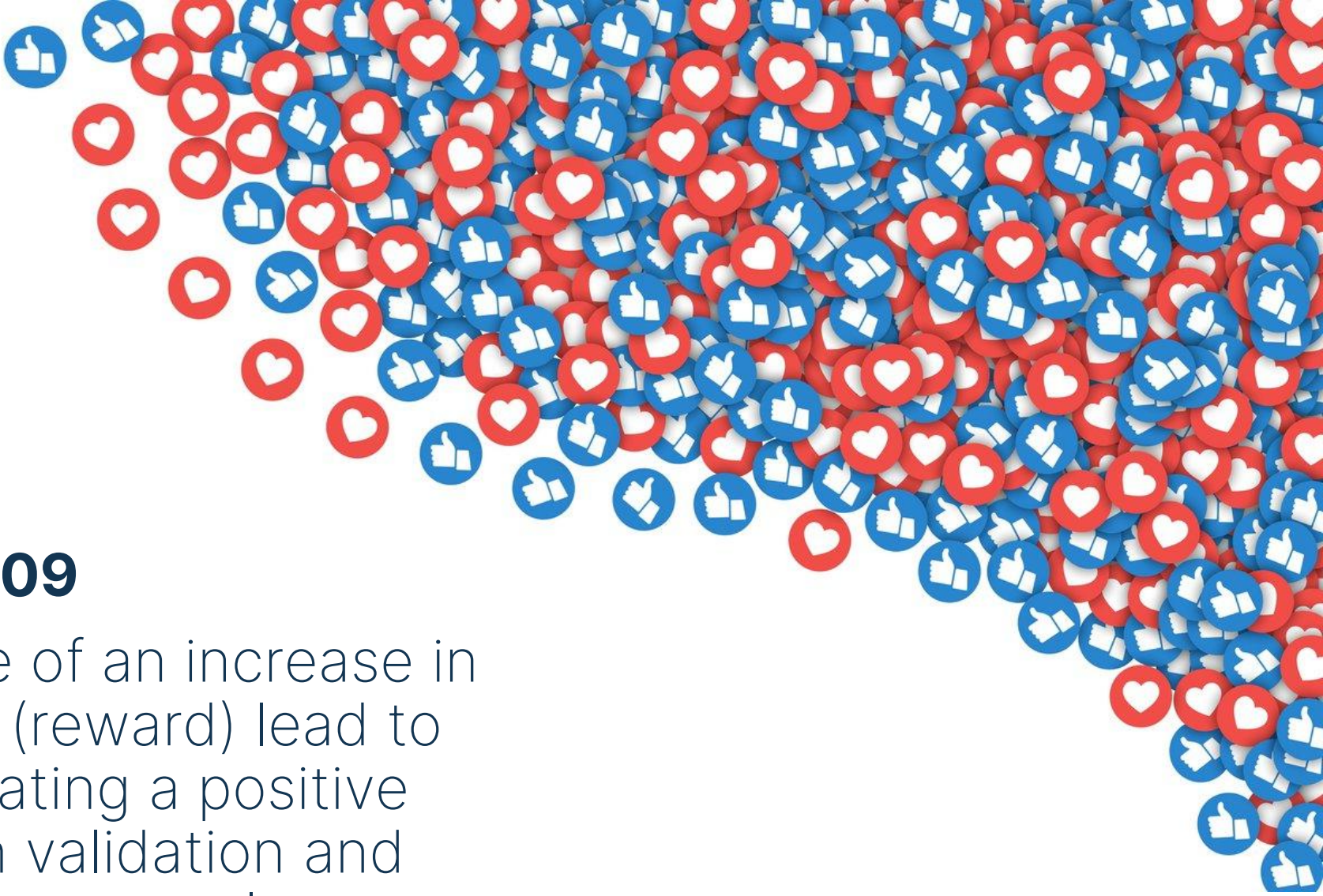




Dangerous Design Features

- Rewards / Likes
- Infinite Scroll
- Notification Gaps
- Filters
- Ephemeral Messages

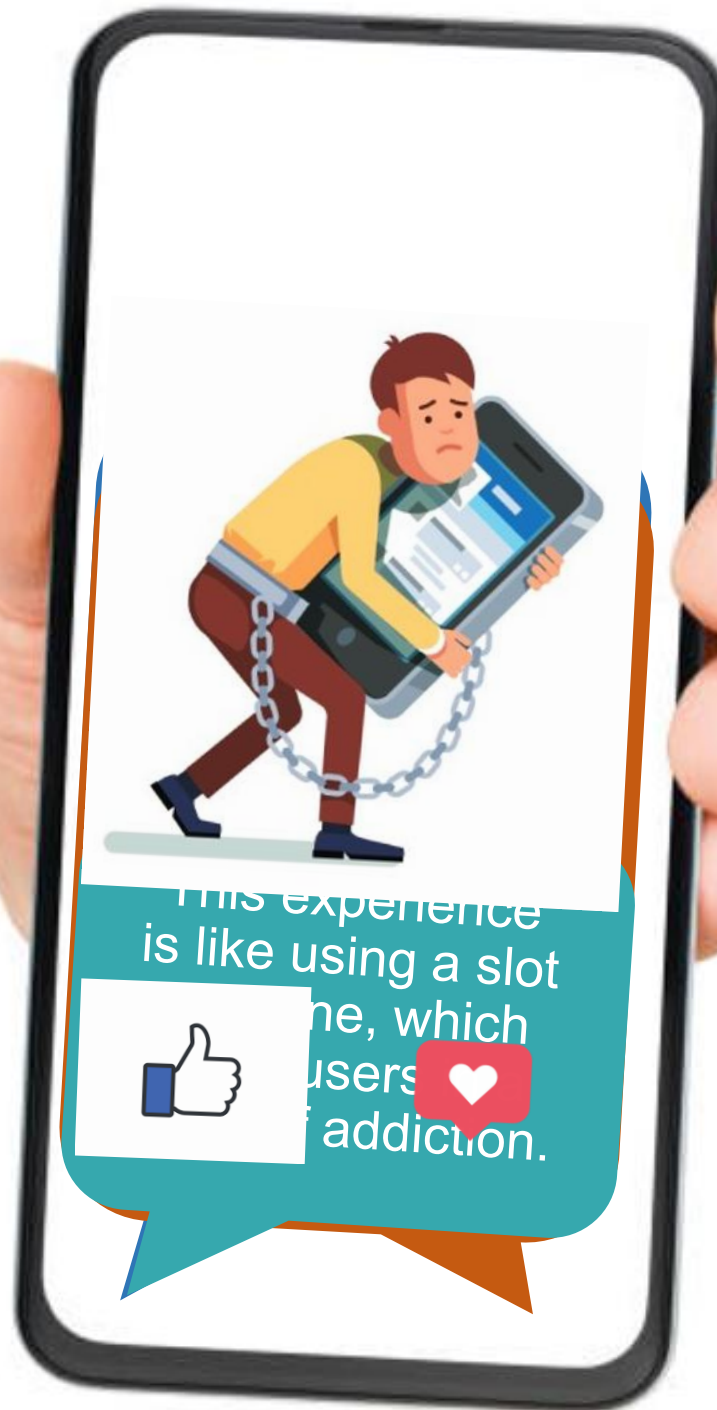
“Likes”



Like introduced in 2009

For any user, the allure of an increase in number of such “likes” (reward) lead to more frequent use creating a positive feedback loop through validation and the feeling of constant approval.

Infinite Scroll





Rewards and Gamifying Relationships

For any user, the allure of an increase in number of such “likes” (reward) can make her use a social media app again and again. This is the trigger that creates a positive feedback loop through validation and the feeling of constant approval.



Ongoing Snapstreak



Snapstreak is about to expire

100

Your Snapstreak with each other has crossed hundred days

Push Notifications

- Constantly alert users and create psychological cravings, luring them to their phone screens.
- Uncertainty, approval, and the fear of missing out (FOMO) increases the user's motivation to view these notifications.
- Social Media intentionally delay notifications to lure users back to the app.

Ephemeral Messaging

- “Disappearing message” feature, cyberbullying becomes effortless.
- Ill-intented users can freely express hateful thoughts and harass on their terms as it leaves no paper trail.
- Teens may certainly be exposed to inappropriate content (e.g. harmful content like sexting or violence).





Filters

- Despite expert warnings, Facebook and Instagram permit harmful beauty filters to avoid being 'paternalistic.'



Social Media Business Model

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Increase number of users and engage their attention for as long and as frequently as possible.



User attention is then sold to advertisers for revenue.



Social Media companies design apps to actively, and often inconspicuously, encourages addictive user behavior.



Meta's Proactive Incident Response

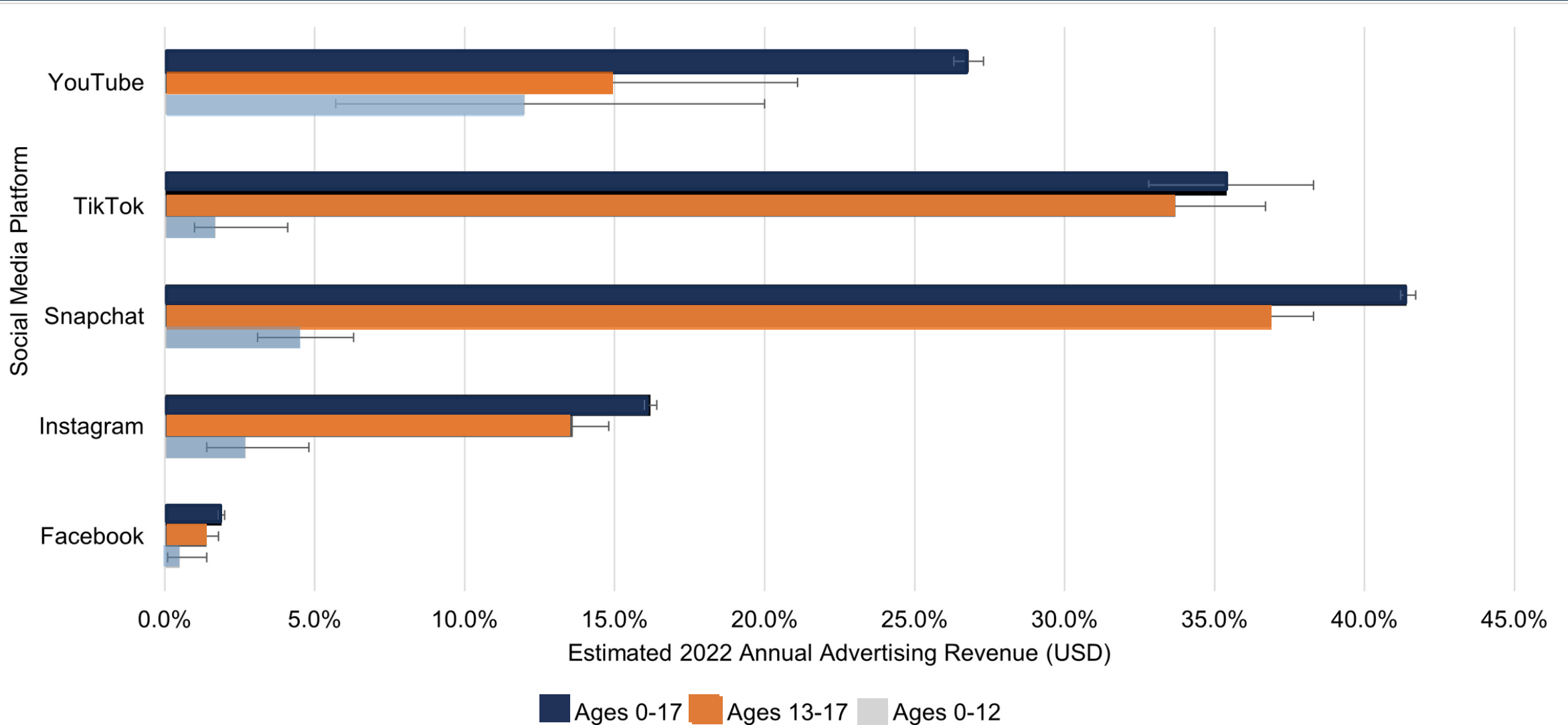
“
**Why do we care about
tweens? They are a valuable
but untapped audience.**



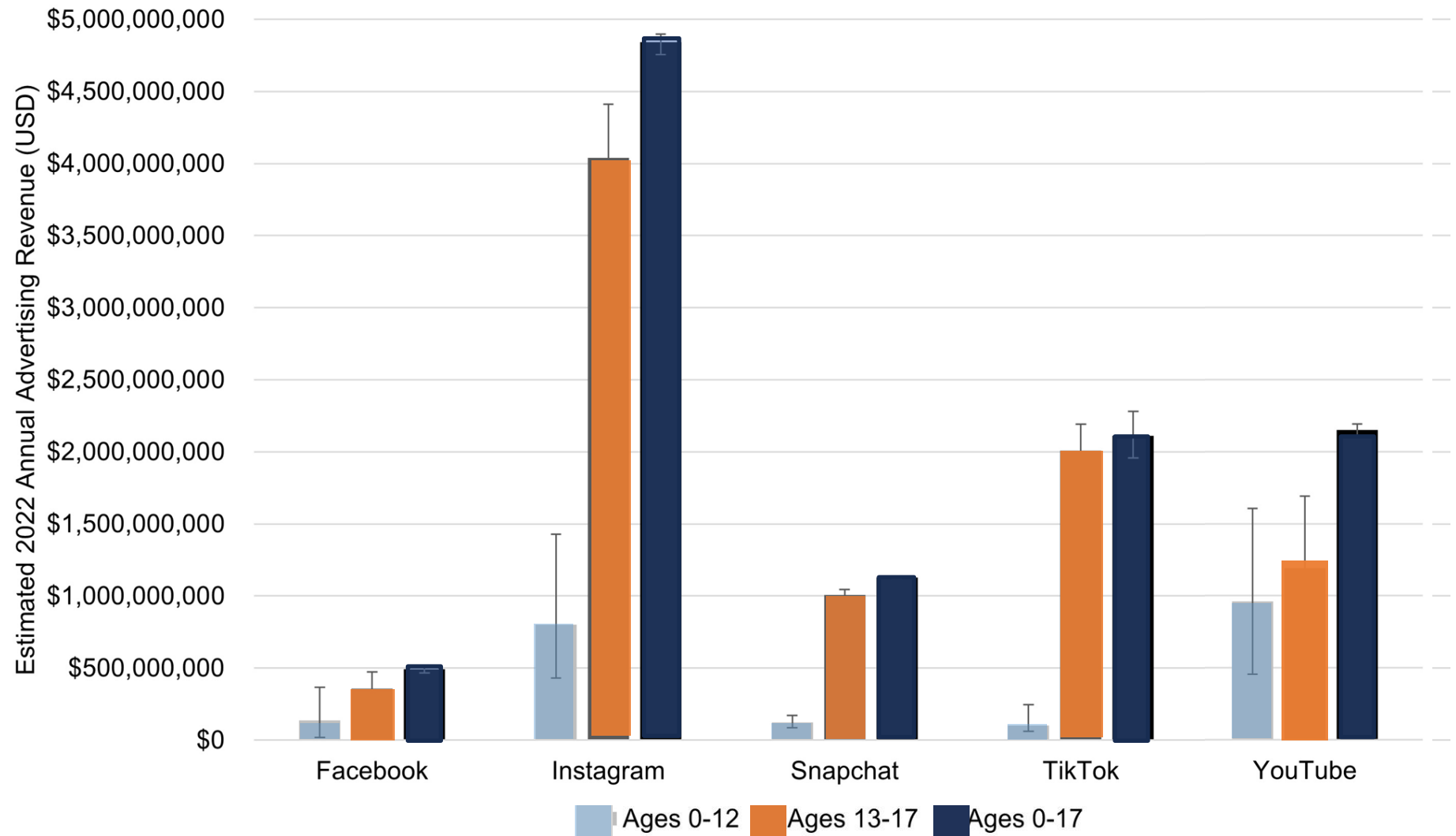
Quote from 2020

META

Minors are a Major Part of the Business



A Single Year of Advertising Revenue



BOTTOM LINE



1 Social Media platforms intentionally designed to be addictive.

+

= 3

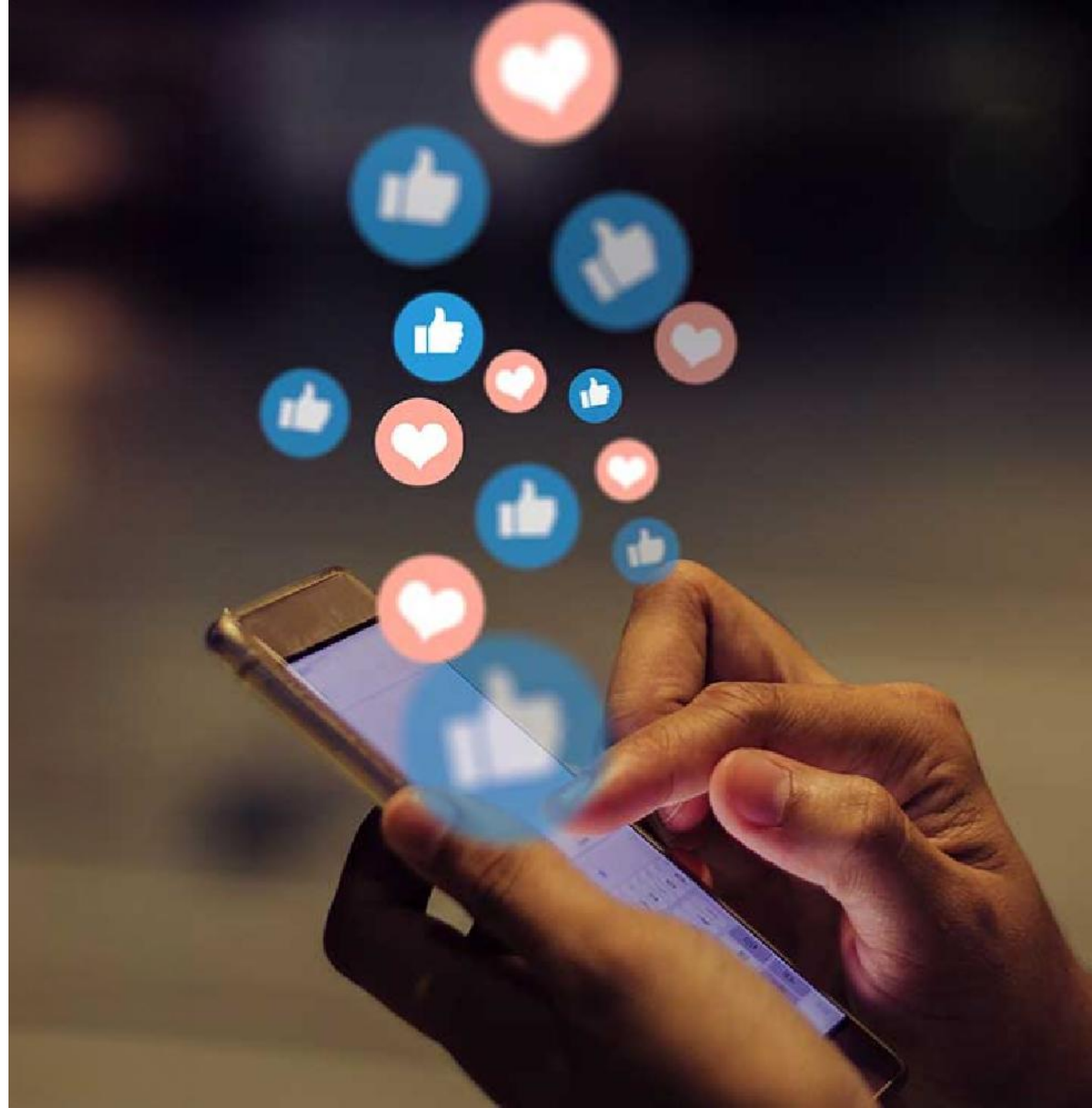
Social Media companies knowingly exploit children throughout the world to drive corporate profit.

2 Algorithms target users with content to increase time spent on platform despite harmful impact of content.

Consequences to Students

- Anxiety and Depression
- Social Anxiety Disorder
- Declined academic performance
- Sleep disruption
- Eating Disorders (Anorexia, Bulimia, Binge-Eating)
- Psychiatric Disorder Symptoms
- ADD/ADHD
- OCD
- Stress and/or Lack of Focus
- Self-Harm or Thoughts of Self-Harm
- Suicidal Ideations and Attempts

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Downstream Consequences to School Districts

Districts have been forced to expend substantial time and resources combating excessive use in schools, educating about the harm and its warped version of reality, and providing support to treat the direct mental health consequences.

Rising Mental Issues

- ❖ The rates of mental health issues among children have climbed steadily since 2010.
- ❖ By 2018, suicide was the second leading cause of death for youth.

Institutional Response

- ❖ Institutions caring for children, such as school districts, have no choice but to address the aftermath.
- ❖ This has included bullying, depression, suicide, acting out, disrupting class, and engaging in dangerous social media challenges.

Harms to School Districts

- Teachers, Counselors, and Administrative time on online bullying, digital drama, inappropriate content
- Increased need for mental health professionals in schools
- Declined academic performance
- Suicide Attempts and Threats of Violence
- Social Media challenges geared towards destruction of school property





National Efforts to Protect Students

Hundreds of school districts have filed federal lawsuits, consolidating cases into multidistrict litigation (MDL) in Northern District of California.

Ongoing legal battles focus on whether social media companies can be held liable for student mental health crises.

Federal Court expects first school district claims to be brought to a jury early next year.

Two Types of Cases

Governmental Entities such as School Districts:

Forced to address the aftermath, including bullying, depression, suicide, self-harm, acting out, disrupting class, and engaging in dangerous social media challenges, sextortion.

Forced to expend precious substantial time and resources combating excessive use in schools, educating about the harm and its warped version of reality, and providing support to treat the direct mental health consequences.



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Two Types of Cases

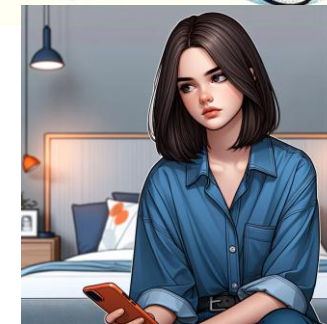
Individual Cases = Teens or Young Adults:

Suffered one or more injuries or conditions investigated related to their use of the platform(s) including eating disorders, sextortion, suicide, self harm and received treatment or counseling for the injury or condition.

Used one of the following Social Media Platforms before age 21:

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Snap
- Tik Tok

Commonly uses (or have used) platforms more than three hours per day.



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Similarity with Vaping Litigation

Damages recovered for schools/school districts



Thank You

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