

As Facebook comes under fire, Instagram Kids is on pause

Article

The news: Facebook is not moving forward with “Instagram Kids” right now, head of Instagram Adam Mosseri shared in a blog post Monday. Mosseri defended the project as “the right thing to do” nonetheless and said the team will instead focus on demonstrating the market need for such a product.

More on this: In the post, Mosseri highlighted that kids are receiving phones at younger ages —and then misrepresenting how old they are to download apps meant for people 13 and up.

- Mosseri seemed to acknowledge that Facebook hasn't put enough effort into convincing parents and policymakers that Instagram Kids is useful or important, saying the pause “will give us time to work with parents, experts, policymakers, and regulators, to listen to their concerns, and to demonstrate the value and importance of this project for younger teens online today.”
- While Instagram Kids is on pause, the company is continuing to develop safety tools aimed at teens 13 and up; these new features will be opt-in, which critics say could limit their positive impact.
- Last week, Instagram announced two new features it is looking into: actively encouraging users to look away from potentially harmful content, and making it easier to pause one's account.

How we got here: The Wall Street Journal's exposé series “The Facebook Files” has put the social media company on the defensive on multiple fronts.

Firing back: This past Sunday, Facebook's head of research Pratiti Raychoudhury shot back at the Journal's reporting on Instagram's effects on teenagers in a company blog post.

- Raychoudhury wrote that Facebook engages in internal research to improve experience for teens, and that internal slide decks highlight the worst possible results of Instagram usage to focus executives on solving the most pressing problems.
- She pointed out that in 11 of 12 categories on a slide referenced by the Journal, more teenage girls facing serious issues such as loneliness and anxiety said that Instagram had a positive impact on those challenges.
- Body image was the sole area where Instagram made an existing issue worse.

A branding problem: Pressing pause on “Instagram Kids” also comes in the wake of Instagram announcing a global branding campaign, “Yours to Make,” which showcases the benefit of making connections on the app through shared interests.

- Unfortunately, the campaign highlights younger consumers, perhaps heightening the concerns of Instagram Kids critics.

- It’s hard to see how impactful this campaign would be: While Instagram has lost its “cool” status with many younger social media users who prefer **TikTok**, Facebook has seemingly made the seeming miscalculation of tying Instagram closer to its parent—including at the end of its “Yours to Make” spot.

The big takeaway: Pausing “Instagram Kids” will take the project out of the news cycle for now, but Facebook’s evergreen problem is the long-running cynicism from the media and other groups when it comes to the company having users’ best interests in mind.

- While most parents may be fine with child controls on other services like **HBO Max** and **Netflix**, Facebook’s track record with what’s best for its users is spotty at best.

US Teens and Adults Who Use Instagram vs. TikTok, Jan 2020-Jan 2021

% of respondents

	Instagram	TikTok
Jan 2020	44%	9%
Feb 2020	44%	11%
March 2020	44%	11%
April 2020	41%	12%
May 2020	41%	12%
June 2020	39%	13%
July 2020	41%	14%
Aug 2020	42%	16%
Sep 2020	41%	14%
Oct 2020	44%	14%
Nov 2020	45%	16%
Dec 2020	40%	14%
Jan 2021	41%	18%

Note: ages 13+

Source: CivicScience as cited in company blog, Jan 25, 2021

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