

Zuckerberg denies Facebook prioritizes profit over user safety

Whistleblower Frances Haugen called for transparency about how Facebook entices users to keep scrolling, creating ample opportunity for advertisers to reach them.



Former Facebook employee Frances Haugen testifies during a Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation hearing entitled 'Protecting Kids Online: Testimony from a Facebook Whistleblower' on Capitol Hill October 5, 2021 in Washington, DC. Picture: Photo by Drew Angerer/Getty Images

US lawmakers have accused Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg of pushing for higher profits while being cavalier about user safety, and demanded regulators investigate whistleblower accusations that the social media company harms children's mental health and stokes divisions.

Zuckerberg, hours later in a public Facebook post, defended the company, saying the accusations were at odds with Facebook's goals.

"The argument that we deliberately push content that makes people angry for profit is deeply illogical," he wrote. "We make money from ads, and advertisers consistently tell us they don't want their ads next to harmful or angry content. And I don't know any tech company that sets out to build products that make people angry or depressed."

During a Senate Commerce subcommittee hearing, whistleblower Frances Haugen called for transparency about how Facebook entices users to keep scrolling, creating ample opportunity for advertisers to reach them.

"As long as Facebook is operating in the shadows, hiding its research from public scrutiny, it is unaccountable," said Haugen, a former product manager on Facebook's civic misinformation team. She left the nearly \$1 trillion company with tens of thousands of confidential documents.

“The company’s leadership knows how to make Facebook and Instagram safer, but won’t make the necessary changes because they have put their astronomical profits before people. Congressional action is needed,” Haugen said.

Mr. Zuckerberg said that, at the heart of the accusations “is this idea that we prioritize profit over safety and well-being”. “That’s just not true,” he said.



US lawmakers have accused Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg of pushing for higher profits while being cavalier about user safety. Picture: Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images

Senator Dan Sullivan, said he was concerned how Facebook and subsidiaries like Instagram affected the mental health of children. “We’re going to look back 20 years from now and all of us are going to be like, ‘What the hell were we thinking?’”

Panel chair Senator Richard Blumenthal, a Democrat, said Facebook knew that its products were addictive. “Tech now faces that big tobacco jaw-dropping moment of truth,” he said.

He called for Zuckerberg to testify before the committee, and for the Securities and Exchange Commission and Federal Trade Commission to investigate Facebook.

“Our children are the ones who are victims. Teens today looking in the mirror feel doubt and insecurity. Mark Zuckerberg ought to be looking at himself in the mirror,” Blumenthal said.

Blumenthal said after the hearing that he would want to ask Zuckerberg why he rejected recommendations to make products safer for users.

Zuckerberg, in his post, said Facebook would not stop researching its societal impact. But he wrote that Congress needed to update rules to make clear the legal age for teens to use internet services, how to verify their ages and where to “balance teens’ privacy while giving parents visibility into their activity.”

Haugen said she would encourage “oversight and public scrutiny” into Facebook’s content recommendation algorithms and their consequences. She suggested creating a dedicated body within the federal government to oversee social media companies.

Source: <https://www.irisht Examiner.com/world/arid-40714322.html>

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