

Talking Points for a Discussion on Social Media Algorithms Targeting Kids

1. Addictiveness and Distraction:

- Have you noticed how electronic addictions result in significant time shifts away from family interactions? Even when we're together, the intrusion of devices can be palpable.
- I've observed that our family time is often interrupted by the lure of smartphones and social media. It's concerning to see how much time we spend glued to screens instead of engaging with each other.

2. Exposure to Inappropriate Content:

- Phones and social media platforms can be dangerous for young people, exposing them to inappropriate and harmful content. While the ability to find online communities may seem beneficial, the risk of being exposed to and addicted to dangerous content far outweighs any potential benefits.
- Despite efforts to filter content, the algorithms prioritize engagement over safety, leading to exposure to inappropriate material.

3. Algorithmic Influence:

- It's important to recognize that the algorithm isn't looking out for our best interests. It doesn't care about us or our children—it cares about maximizing engagement and getting us addicted.
- The algorithm is like a relentless salesman, constantly vying for our attention and keeping us hooked. It's crucial to be mindful of its influence and take steps to minimize its impact on our lives.

4. Impact on Mental Health:

- The constant barrage of content on social media is seriously disrupting learning and mental well-being. It's troubling to see how it's putting an entire generation at risk by undercutting their preparation for the next stage of life.
- We need to acknowledge the detrimental effects that social media and algorithmic influence can have on mental health. It's crucial to prioritize our well-being and find ways to limit our exposure to these harmful influences.

5. Importance of Setting Boundaries:

- Given the risks associated with excessive screen time and exposure to inappropriate content, it's essential to establish clear boundaries and guidelines for device usage within our families.
- We can take proactive steps to protect ourselves and our children from the negative effects of algorithms by setting limits on screen time, monitoring online activity, and fostering open communication about the dangers of online platforms.

6. Promoting Digital Literacy:

- Educating ourselves and our children about the algorithms and their influence is key to navigating the digital landscape safely. By promoting digital literacy and critical thinking skills, we can empower ourselves to make informed choices and protect our well-being online.
- Let's take the initiative to learn more about how algorithms work and their potential impact on our lives. By staying informed and vigilant, we can better navigate the digital world and mitigate the risks associated with algorithmic influence.

Case Study: Experiment by the Center for Countering Digital Hate

Did you know that algorithms on social media platforms like TikTok can have incredibly harmful effects on young users? Recently, Imran Ahmed, founder and CEO of The Center for Countering Digital Hate, conducted an eye-opening experiment that sheds light on just how dangerous these algorithms can be."

1. Experiment Findings:

- Ahmed's organization created accounts on TikTok, listing users as 13-year-old girls—the youngest age allowed on the platform. They played by TikTok's rules, and within minutes, the algorithm began feeding content promoting self-harm to these young girls. It's disturbing how quickly and effectively the algorithm targets vulnerable users.

2. Examples of Harmful Content:

- In less than three minutes, the TikTok algorithm started showing videos promoting dangerous behaviors, such as extreme dieting and self-harm.

These videos may begin with aspirational images but quickly escalate to promoting harmful practices like extreme dieting and self-harm.

3. Impact on Vulnerable Users:

- What's truly alarming is how the algorithm targets vulnerable users based on their interactions and interests. For example, an account with a name like 'Lauren Lose Weight' received significantly more self-harm content than a regular account. It's a stark reminder that the algorithm doesn't care about the well-being of users—it's solely focused on engagement and addiction.

4. Lack of Regulation and Oversight:

- The algorithm's relentless pursuit of engagement poses a serious threat to the mental health and safety of young users. Yet, there's a lack of regulation and oversight to hold social media companies accountable for the harmful content they promote.

5. Call for Action:

- It's time for policymakers and regulatory bodies to step in and address the dangers of algorithmic targeting on social media platforms. We need stricter regulations to protect vulnerable users, especially children, from harmful content and addictive practices perpetuated by algorithms.

6. Promoting Awareness and Advocacy:

- As concerned citizens, we must raise awareness about the dangers of algorithmic targeting and advocate for changes that prioritize the well-being of users over profits. It's essential to support organizations like The Center for Countering Digital Hate in their efforts to combat harmful online practices and hold tech companies accountable.