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MEMORANDUM

To: Interested Parties
From: Dr. Frank I Luntz
Re: American concerns about the impact of social media and AI
Date: July 21, 2023

Of all the projects I've worked on over the past decade, **none has more moms more concerned** than social media and artificial intelligence (AI). **Remember this statistic as you read this memo: 64% of people ages 18-29 know someone personally who has been "damaged" by social media.** For moms, it's 47% who personally know someone, perhaps themselves, who has been hurt.

So when moms tell me in focus groups that their children become petulant, sullen, even threatening when they try to take their cell phone away or limit access to social media, I listen – for those are signs of physical and emotional addiction. And when moms tell me that they can no longer have productive conversations with their own children, I listen, because it may already be late.

The Seven Key Findings

1. This issue is deeply personal. **More than one in three (34%) have been or know someone who has been harmed by social media – for moms, nearly half (47%) noted these harms.** Among those ages 18-29 it is even higher (64%). Consider this: more people under age 30 have been personally, negatively impacted by social media than by COVID.
2. People are especially concerned about the negative impact of social media on the social and emotional development of our children. When asked what result or fear of social media or AI matters most, **half 52% of Americans across party lines (47% Republicans, 55% Democrats) believe that children's "addictive" relationship with social media makes them worse at interacting with people face-to-face.** Forty-eight percent (53% Republicans, 49% Democrats) believe it weakens children's ability to think for themselves, robbing them of their social skills and childhood innocence. Make no mistake: the impact on our children is already serious and significant.
3. The adverse impact on truth and the quality of information is also a compelling issue for both Republicans and Democrats. **A third of all Americans, evenly distributed between Republicans and Democrats, say they can't tell what's true and not true on social media platforms.** At a time when "the truth" is the single highest priority among the American population, this finding is among the most alarming.

Methodology: A total of 1,100 people were interviewed in June—1,000 people nationally, including a 100-respondent oversample of moms with at least one child 17 years or younger at home. We surveyed 220 moms in total. There is a $\pm 3\%$ margin of error. We also did a nationwide 2-hour listening session with moms from more than a dozen states.

4. A third of the country has tried one of the AI platforms and a surprisingly high number of Americans (75%) have at least some familiarity with advanced AI and the potential to make what they see as the bad things about social media even worse. **Specifically, nearly half (46%) are worried most about the unintended consequences that we cannot even predict yet** because of how fast the technology is developing. I've heard some people in Washington wanting to go slow in creating AI safeguards, note wanting to act in haste. The public is of the opposite opinion: they want action now, before it is too late.
5. While the public thinks it is the responsibility of parents to manage their children's relationship with social media platforms, they can't do it alone and many call for greater accountability from the platforms and want responsible safeguards. **When asked if the government should address the potential impact of social media, only 23% of the public responded "no."**
6. When it comes to advanced AI technologies, **a wide margin (62% to 38%) of the public would prefer action to address their concerns rather than waiting and worrying that we could stifle innovation as a result.** This support holds equally among Republicans and Democrats (both at 62%). The public clearly wants action – and moms even more.
7. There are a lot of metaphors and analogies already being used in the AI discussion. The one that works best: **establish a government review process similar to potentially addictive FDA medicines.** The public embraces this line of communication better than all others.

To be clear, this isn't a **future** health or technology crisis. It's happening right now. And it's not happening in red states or blue states. It's happening in all states.

And while there are some differences in suggested solutions between the two parties, there is almost no difference in diagnosing the problem. The chasm occurs among age cohorts. The younger you are, the more frightened you are because the more familiar you are with social media.

Consider this: If our TV or computers break, we know where to take them to be fixed...immediately. Many of us can't function unless our technology functions. But if our children break, there is NO mechanic or repair shop.

Everyone wants the truth back. Moms want their kids back. And nobody wants to see the level of bullying and abuse. The public overwhelmingly sees a problem in front of them. Just 10% do not. Do you? Please keep that in mind as you peruse this document.

Real Quotes from Real Moms

Describing social media

“It’s a serious virus that is attacking people. It infects every aspect of our lives from how we get news, to how we relate to our peers, our families, and our communities.”

The impact of social media on being a mom

“It’s a distortion to the family. It’s a distraction from life.”

“I’m exhausted every day. It’s never ending. I have to be intentional in my day about finding time to address whatever my child sees on it. It could be when they’re going to bed or right when they wake up. I have to adjust my life.”

“I am paranoid. My kids can’t distinguish between online personas and actual friends.”

The impact of social media on children

“If they don’t get a certain number of likes, it really damages their self-esteem.”

“It’s taking away their innocence. It’s taking away their creative playtime. It’s taking away their ability to run around outside because they don’t want to anymore.”

“It’s creating an unhealthy addiction but there’s no way to address it.”

What moms would tell social media platforms

“You are destroying the next generation for profit or maybe more nefarious purposes. They know what this does to children’s brains. They have designed it to be addictive.”

“You’re robbing our children of their childhoods.”

“Acknowledge the fact that their technology affects children differently than adults. They should hold themselves accountable.”

The role of Congress in addressing the impact of social media

“They need to bring all these companies to the table and establish rules because we have none now. Social media needs a warning label like cigarettes.”

“Until Congress puts laws in place for restrictions on using social media, it’s going to act like a vampire and suck the happiness out of everything.”

Key Questions for Reference

Have you or anyone you know feel they have been mentally or physically harmed in some way because of social media?

	Total	GOP	DEM	MOMS
Yes/Me	13%	8%	14%	14%
Yes/Someone else	21	20	19	33
YES (NET)	34	28	33	47
No	66	71	67	53

Which do you think is a more honest and accurate description of the impact of social media?
Please select your top THREE choices.

	Total	GOP	DEM	MOMS
It makes them worse at interacting with people face-to-face	52%	47%	55%	47%
It weakens a child's ability to think for themselves	48	53	49	35
It hinders a child's social development	43	41	53	39
It wastes their time and talent	30	33	27	33
It persuades a child to make bad decisions	25	26	23	30
It damages a child physically and mentally	25	23	25	32
It makes children less caring and compassionate	23	26	22	19
It scrambles a child's brain	16	13	15	22
It sucks the joy out of them	13	11	12	19
None of these situations occur	10	12	7	9

Which of the following descriptions of social media do you find the most convincing and compelling?
(The top three most selected out of the 11 total responses).

	Total	GOP	DEM	MOMS
You can't tell what's true and what isn't.	34%	37%	34%	26%
Ruins family time (kids on phones instead of interacting)	25	28	22	30
It's like digital nicotine - an addiction you can't stop using.	25	22	29	25

How do you determine what national and international news you get from social media is trustworthy?
Please select your top TWO choices.

	Total	GOP	DEM	MOMS
I verify the information outside of social media	51%	51%	52%	54%
I decide based on the author/source	39	40	41	36
It shows up in my newsfeed	22	25	21	23
It's been tagged as verified by the social media platform	16	11	21	20
It involves an influential figure I like or trust	16	15	15	22
It was shared by a family member	15	17	10	18
It was shared by a friend	12	11	12	10
None of these	17	17	17	10

Are you familiar with interactive AI [ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE] platforms that communicate with humans in a conversational manner such as ChatGPT or that create new audiovisual content like Midjourney?

	Total	GOP	DEM	MOMS
Yes/I have used more than one AI platform	18%	14%	21%	20%
Yes/ I have used only one AI platform	17	16	18	17
Yes/I'm somewhat familiar with AI but have never used any AI platform	42	44	42	42
No, I know very little about AI	24	25	20	21

If we, as a society, were to take action to address, limit or slow down the development of AI, which statement would you agree with more?

	Total	GOP	DEM	MOMS
The problems, dangers and consequences posed by AI for our children, our country, and the world outweigh the potential consequences of delaying or slowing down the development of AI.	62%	62%	62%	64%
We'd be limiting meaningful innovation, our economy would suffer, and our global competitiveness would be harmed if we regulate AI while other countries speed ahead.	37	38	38	36

What concerns you most about interactive AI? Please select your top TWO choices.

	Total	GOP	DEM	MOMS
There may be unintended consequences that we cannot even predict yet because of how fast the technology is developing.	46%	46%	49%	47%
AI systems are evolving faster than humans can keep up.	27	25	31	24
It collects and processes large amounts of my personal, private data	26	29	21	34
Its decision-making processes aren't transparent and are difficult to understand, so it's hard to hold anyone accountable.	23	22	19	25
Bad actors could manipulate video, audio, or visual content to misrepresent candidates running for office.	21	21	19	17
Foreign adversaries could have influence and impact on our elections.	17	15	23	16
It will worsen the way targeted content is fed to my social media feed so I receive what others want me to see.	14	14	12	14
I don't trust what I don't understand ... and AI is hard to understand.	14	13	11	16
It will worsen the echo chambers on social media platforms and further divide Americans.	13	14	14	7

Who/what MOST needs to take action to address the impact of social media on children under age 18? Please select your top choice.

	Total	GOP	DEM	MOMS
Parents	52%	67%	43%	64%
Social media platforms themselves	20	17	25	25
An independent government watchdog	11	7	10	2
Congress	7	6	10	3
Teachers and Educators	7	2	10	5
None of them/social media is fine as it is	3	1	2	1

How should the government address the potential impact of social media? Should it be similar to...?
 Please select your top TWO choices. *(The top three most selected out of the nine total responses).*

	Total	GOP	DEM	MOMS
A government review process similar to the FDA for medicines	32%	26%	38%	26%
How the government regulates drugs and controlled substances	26	22	28	21
Ratings/warnings on TV shows/movies	25	23	28	26