[Harvard University revealed](https://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2017/06/05/business/05reuters-usa-harvard.html) that it had [rescinded admissions offers](http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2017/6/5/2021-offers-rescinded-memes/) to at least 10 students who shared offensive images within what they thought was a private Facebook group chat. The students posted memes and images that mocked minority groups, child abuse, sexual assault and the Holocaust, among other things.

Sharing videos, images and memes creates the opportunity for an instantaneous positive feedback loop that can perpetuate poor decision making.

Adults need to shift the conversation around teens’ social media use away from a fear of getting caught and more toward healthy socialization, effective self-regulation and overall safety.

But such high-level monitoring runs the risk of breaching trust with teens at a crucial developmental time.

Another option is to help young social media users realize that their online and real-life experiences are more intertwined than they may think.

Some also point out that Facebook’s interests as a company often conflict with the safety of its users. That means you’re going to have a collision between what’s good for mental health and what’s good for profit.

But social media apps like Instagram exacerbate that problem for a segment of the population that is already prone to making these comparisons

[It] could just be that a system that encourages visual sharing unintentionally creates a prestige economy that is detrimental to the vulnerable

Potentially, if there was more diversity incorporated into those algorithms, it might be helpful

While social media may offer some benefits, there are ample indicators that social media can also pose a risk of harm to the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents.

With adolescence and childhood representing a critical stage in brain development that can make young people more vulnerable to harms from social media, the Surgeon General is issuing a call for urgent action by policymakers, technology companies, researchers, families, and young people alike to gain a better understanding of the full impact of social media use, maximize the benefits and minimize the harms of social media platforms, and create safer, healthier online environments to protect children.

Children are exposed to harmful content on social media, ranging from violent and sexual content, to bullying and harassment. And for too many children, social media use is compromising their sleep and valuable in-person time with family and friends. We are in the middle of a national youth mental health crisis, and I am concerned that social media is an important driver of that crisis – one that we must urgently address.

Among the benefits, adolescents report that social media helps them feel more accepted (58%), like they have people who can support them through tough times (67%), like they have a place to show their creative side (71%), and more connected to what’s going on in their friends’ lives (80%).

However, social media use can be excessive and problematic for some children. Recent research shows that adolescents who spend more than three hours per day on social media face double the risk of experiencing poor mental health outcomes, such as symptoms of depression and anxiety. Social media may also perpetuate body dissatisfaction, disordered eating behaviors, social comparison, and low self-esteem, especially among adolescent girls. Studies have also shown a relationship between social media use and poor sleep quality, reduced sleep duration, sleep difficulties, and depression among youth.

Policymakers can take steps to strengthen safety standards and limit access in ways that make social media safer for children of all ages, better protect children’s privacy, support digital and media literacy, and fund additional research.

Technology companies can better and more transparently assess the impact of their products on children, share data with independent researchers to increase our collective understanding of the impacts, make design and development decisions that prioritize safety and health – including protecting children’s privacy and better adhering to age minimums – and improve systems to provide effective and timely responses to complaints.

Parents and caregivers can make plans in their households such as establishing tech-free zones that better foster in-person relationships, teach kids about responsible online behavior and model that behavior, and report problematic content and activity.

Children and adolescents can adopt healthy practices like limiting time on platforms, blocking unwanted content, being careful about sharing personal information, and reaching out if they or a friend need help or see harassment or abuse on the platforms.

Researchers can further prioritize social media and youth mental health research that can support the establishment of standards and evaluation of best practices to support children’s health.

Information operations exploit information systems (like social media platforms) to manipulate audiences for strategic, political goals—in this case, one of the goals was to influence the U.S. election in 2016.

“bots” – pushing messages in a coordinated manner, an increasingly common practice to manipulate public opinion by creating the false impression that many people are talking about a particular subject.

For example, BotSlayer could be used during a presidential debate to not only instantly detect when a candidate’s username or related hashtags are trending, but also automatically assign a “bot score” to indicate whether the surge appears related to bot activity. In business, BotSlayer could help organizations protect against reputational threats that rely on automated accounts to amplify messages. In journalism, the tool could be used to monitor against manipulation of reporting on trending topics, or warn the public against disinformation attacks.

The findings highlight a major challenge for efforts to accurately communicate the rapidly evolving science about the pandemic when false and ambiguous information can spread quickly, whether inadvertently or deliberately, through social media, polarized news sources and other outlets.

It is 100% the responsibility of the platform to protect its users from harmful content,

Simply prohibiting certain kinds of content isn't going to help people find good information, or make them feel more confident about what they're hearing from their medical providers

"I think we all have a collective responsibility," Jha said of combating misinformation about COVID. "The consequences of not getting this right — of spreading that misinformation — is literally tens of thousands of people dying unnecessarily."

The rise of “fake news” and the proliferation of doctored narratives that are spread by humans and bots online are challenging publishers and platforms.

the quality and veracity of information online deteriorate due to the spread of unreliable, sometimes even dangerous, socially destabilizing ideas

**The fake news ecosystem preys on some of our deepest human instincts:** Respondents said humans’ primal quest for success and power – their “survival” instinct – will continue to degrade the online information environment in the next decade. They predicted that manipulative actors will use new digital tools to take advantage of humans’ inbred preference for comfort and convenience and their craving for the answers they find in reinforcing echo chambers.

**Our brains are not wired to contend with the pace of technological change:** These respondents said the rising speed, reach and efficiencies of the internet and emerging online applications will magnify these human tendencies and that technology-based solutions will not be able to overcome them. They predicted a future information landscape in which fake information crowds out reliable information. Some even foresaw a world in which widespread information scams and mass manipulation cause broad swathes of public to simply give up on being informed participants in civic life.

**Technology can help fix these problems:** These more hopeful experts said the rising speed, reach and efficiencies of the internet, apps and platforms can be harnessed to rein in fake news and misinformation campaigns. Some predicted better methods will arise to create and promote trusted, fact-based news sources.

**It is also human nature to come together and fix problems:** The hopeful experts in this canvassing took the view that people have always adapted to change and that this current wave of challenges will also be overcome. They noted that misinformation and bad actors have always existed but have eventually been marginalized by smart people and processes. They expect well-meaning actors will work together to find ways to enhance the information environment. They also believe better information literacy among citizens will enable people to judge the veracity of material content and eventually raise the tone of discourse.

Humans are by nature selfish, tribal, gullible convenience seekers who put the most trust in that which seems familiar

The respondents who supported this view noted that people’s actions – from consciously malevolent and power-seeking behaviors to seemingly more benign acts undertaken for comfort or convenience – will work to undermine a healthy information environment.

There is no market for the truth. The public isn’t motivated to seek out verified, vetted information. They are happy hearing what confirms their views. And people can gain more creating fake information (both monetary and in notoriety) than they can keeping it from occurring.”

 In existing economic, political and social systems, the powerful corporate and government leaders most able to improve the information environment profit most when it is in turmoil

A large number of respondents said the interests of the most highly motivated actors, including those in the worlds of business and politics, are generally not motivated to “fix” the proliferation of misinformation. Those players will be a key driver in the worsening of the information environment in the coming years and/or the lack of any serious attempts to effectively mitigate the problem.

 Human tendencies and infoglut drive people apart and make it harder for them to agree on “common knowledge.” That makes healthy debate difficult and destabilizes trust. The fading of news media contributes to the problem

Many respondents expressed concerns about how people’s struggles to find and apply accurate information contribute to a larger social and political problem: There is a growing deficit in commonly accepted facts or some sort of cultural “common ground.” Why has this happened? They cited several reasons:

Ignorance breeds frustration and ‘a growing fraction of the population has neither the skills nor the native intelligence to master growing complexity’