Interview with Blen

- *Q: Thank you for your willingness to do this interview with me. Do you mind if I record our conversation to reference it later?*
    - *Blen:* sure, that's fine with me.
- *Q: Tell me about yourself. i.e., name, profession, age, etc*
    - *Blen*: My name is Blen Tekle. I am a Biomedical Engineer at Abbot Laboratories. I am a mother of one beautiful girl and my age let's say between 30 - 40 years. I'll tell you that off the record … hahaha…
- *Q: Can you walk me through how you typically use social media on a daily basis? Which platforms do you engage with most, and why?*
    - *Blen*: I typically start my day by checking Instagram during breakfast, and I use it intermittently throughout the day, especially during short breaks at work. Instagram feels like a quick, visual escape—whether it's scrolling through beautifully curated wellness pages or following updates on parenting advice. I follow a lot of accounts that focus on health, wellness, and child development, so it feels informative but also relaxing. I like how visual the platform is—seeing photos or short videos gives me inspiration for daily activities with my daughter, new meal ideas, or tips for balancing work and motherhood.
      When I use Facebook, it's more about connecting with my family and extended circle of friends. I live far from many of them, so I use Facebook to stay updated on their lives. I also participate in community groups mostly parenting groups where moms share experiences about raising children, managing work-life balance, or even medical advice from trusted sources. The groups feel like a safe space for getting advice or sharing a quick story about something my daughter did.

    - *Blen:* I think what keeps me coming back to Instagram is the combination of quick, digestible content and the visualappeal. It's easy to find useful tips or inspiration for my day in a matter of seconds. For Facebook, it's more about community. The interactions I have there are usually deeper—comments on a post, participating in a group discussion, or sending messages to family members. Facebook gives me that sense of connection, especially when I want to feel close to people, despite physical distance.

Q: How do you feel about interacting with others on these platforms? Are there any features or dynamics that make these interactions meaningful or difficult?

- *Blen:* One specific experience I had on Facebook that delighted me was when I discovered a local support group for mothers who were struggling with balancing work and family life. The group offered genuine support, and the discussions were honest and open. I remember one evening when I felt particularly overwhelmed with work, and I posted about it in the group. I received so many supportive responses from other mothers who understood exactly what I was going through. Their advice and encouragement helped me get through that tough period, and I felt validated in my struggles.
- *Blen:* On the flip side, Instagram has been frustrating due to the increasing number of irrelevant ads and suggested posts. For instance, I was looking up some healthy

recipes, but after that, I kept getting bombarded with random product ads for weight loss or fitness equipment that I had no interest in. It felt like the platform wasn't recognizing my actual interests and was pushing generic content that didn't resonate with me.

Follow-up: *Do you ever take breaks when that happens?*

- *Blen:* After those frustrating experiences on Instagram, I became more cautious about how much time I spent on the platform. I started skipping stories or scrolling past ads because they felt disruptive. It also lowered my engagement I no longer interact with posts as much as I used to. Now, I only stick to accounts that I've followed for a long time and know I can trust for useful, relevant content. It's made me more selective about where I spend my time on social media.

Q: When you find a post interesting, what makes you engage with it?

- *Blen:* Social media, particularly Instagram and Facebook, serves both personal and professional purposes for me. Professionally, I follow a few biomedical engineering groups and research pages that keep me updated on the latest developments in my field. It's a quick way to stay in touch with the latest scientific studies, job opportunities, or even conferences related to my profession.
  Personally, these platforms allow me to share moments with my daughter, such as her first steps or her latest artwork. They are a space for celebration, sharing milestones, and staying connected with family and friends.

Follow-up: Do you always find it useful and engaging and you find what you are looking easily?

- *Blen:*I wish these platforms did a better job of filtering the content based on what's truly relevant to me. For instance, I'm currently in the stage of my life where I'm more focused on toddler-related content, like developmental milestones or activities for kids. If I could customize my feed to prioritize content like that and limit the ads or unrelated suggestions, it would feel much more personalized and useful. Right now, I feel like I have to sift through a lot of irrelevant material to get to the content that actually matters.

Q: What are the gaps in Existing Platforms ?

- **Blen**: One of the biggest gaps I've noticed on both Instagram and Facebook is the lack of control over what I see. I follow specific pages for parenting tips, but Facebook often push content that's unrelated like fashion or celebrity news when I'm clearly not interested in those topics. Instagram is also guilty of this. My feed is cluttered with posts from people I haven't interacted with in years, and I often miss important updates from my close friends or family members because of the way the algorithm prioritizes certain content.

Follow-up: *Do you ever take breaks when that happens?*

- Blen: I've stopped using Twitter for similar reasons. It became overwhelming, with too much irrelevant content cluttering my feed, and I didn't have control over filtering what I saw. If Twitter had offered better ways to customize the content I saw like being able to easily sort or filter tweets based on my interests I might have continued using it. But it became too much of a hassle to navigate.

Q: How do your relationships with people on social media compare to your relationships in real life? Are there ways social media helps or hinders these connections?

- *Blen:* On Instagram, interactions often feel superficial. People like a post or leave a one-word comment, but there's not much depth to those interactions. The platform seems more focused on quick engagements rather than meaningful conversations. On Facebook, especially in the parenting groups I'm part of, it's different. People share more detailed posts about their experiences, offer advice, and engage in real discussions. There's a sense of community in these groups, and I feel like I can build deeper connections with others who are going through similar life experiences.

Follow-up: what should be improved on Instagram?

- *Blen:* I would love to see more features on Instagram that encourage thoughtful engagement. Maybe adding a feature that allows people to comment on specific parts of a post like highlighting a section of text or video that resonated with them could spark deeper conversations. Right now, the "like and move on" culture doesn't lend itself to building meaningful connections, and I think that's a missed opportunity.

Q: What is your opinion about privacy and moderation on social media ?

- *Blen*: As a mother, I'm extremely concerned about privacy on social media. Sometimes, I hesitate to post pictures of my daughter because I don't know who might end up seeing them or how the platform is using my data. Instagram doesn't give me much confidence in this area, especially when it comes to how my content might be shared or stored. Facebook's history with data breaches makes me even more wary. I always wonder who's really in control of the content once it's posted.

Follow-up: What should be done to improve this ?

- *Blen*: I would improve moderation by giving users more control over their privacy settings. For example, I'd like more controls over who can see my posts, rather than just public, friends, or private. It would also be great if platforms provided more transparency about how content is moderated and flagged. I often wonder how decisions are made about what content gets flagged and who is doing the reviewing. Knowing this would make me feel safer when sharing personal moments, like pictures of my daughter.

Q: what do you thing you are missing from the current social media platforms? Or what should be improved ?

- *Blen:* Platforms like Instagram and Facebook don't fully cater to my identity as a working mother. I have to actively search for content that resonates with me, whether it's parenting tips, work-life balance strategies, or personal development as a mother and a professional. Often, what I come across feels generic, like it's trying to appeal to a broad audience rather than specific groups like mothers juggling careers and family life. While there are some great parenting pages, they're often lost amidst a flood of irrelevant content that doesn't speak to my needs or interests.

Follow-up: What should be improved or changed?

- *Blen:* A platform designed specifically for working mothers would be a game-changer. It could feature dedicated sections based on different phases of motherhood (like newborn care, toddlers, school-age children) and career challenges (returning to work after maternity leave, managing work-from-home life, etc.). The ability to join

specialized groups where moms can share advice, resources, and support for each other would also help. There could also be personalized content recommendations based on the age of your child, your profession, or other factors that reflect the reality of being a working mother. This would make the platform more relevant and save time from having to sift through unrelated content.

Q: How do you typically feel after spending time on social media? Are there specific moments where it affects your mood positively or negatively?

- *Blen:* My emotions after using social media vary. On good days, when I find relevant and positive content like a helpful article about managing toddler tantrums or a success story from another working mother I feel uplifted and motivated. However, on days when my feed is cluttered with irrelevant ads or overly polished, unattainable images of "perfect moms," I end up feeling drained or inadequate. It's hard not to compare myself to those idealized versions of motherhood, and that can leave me feeling down.

Follow-up: do you ever take a break when that happens ?

- *Blen:* I take breaks from social media when I start to feel overwhelmed or stressed. This usually happens when I feel like it's taking too much time away from my family or work. The constant stream of irrelevant content can also be tiring, and when it feels like I'm spending more time filtering through my feed than actually engaging with useful posts, I know it's time to disconnect. These breaks help me reset and focus on what really matters in my life.

Q: When you find a post interesting, what makes you engage with it?

- **Blen**: I'm more likely to engage with posts that provide value something informative, inspiring, or relatable to my life as a mother, an engineer and a person in general. For example, I often engage with parenting tips that give me new ideas on how to interact with my daughter or with scientific updates related to my field. I like to leave comments when I feel I can contribute to the discussion or when the post resonates with my own experiences. If I find an article particularly useful, I'll share it with my friends or family who might benefit from it.

Follow-up: when do you hesitate?

- *Blen:* I hesitate to engage with posts that seem overly controversial or when I'm unsure of the accuracy of the information being shared. I've seen too many arguments erupt in comment sections, and I avoid getting involved in those. Also, if a post feels too sensationalized or clickbait-y, I tend to skip over it. I'd rather spend my time engaging with content that feels authentic and grounded in reality, rather than posts that are just designed to get likes or shares.

Q: What platform you find the most engaging and why?

- *Blen:* I find Instagram's design very appealing because it's simple, visually oriented, and easy to navigate. The focus on imagery allows me to quickly scan through posts, and the stories feature is a great way to catch up with people without spending too much time. The way Instagram organizes its layout makes it a platform I can use for quick breaks during the day without feeling overwhelmed by too much information at once.
  On the other hand, Facebook's interface feels cluttered. There's so much happening on the homepage notifications, event invites, marketplace posts, and random status updates from people I haven't interacted with in years. It's difficult to

focus on what really matters, and the layout doesn't make it easy to find the posts or updates that are most relevant to me. The overwhelming design often makes me want to log out instead of engaging.

Follow-up: *what should be improved in Facebook to make you more engaged?*

- *Blen*: I would change Facebook's design to be more streamlined. For instance, I'd prioritize family and close friends' posts at the top of my feed and make it easier to hide or mute irrelevant updates. I'd also simplify the notifications and make it easier to manage groups, so they don't feel like they're competing for attention with everything else. Cutting down on clutter would make it a more enjoyable experience for users like me, who want to stay connected without the noise.

Q: What are the feature you wish listed?

- *Blen:* On Instagram, I'd love to have a feature that allows me to have more control over my feed. For example, being able to set preferences for the types of content I want to see based on topics I care about (parenting, wellness, news) would be helpful. I'd also like to filter out ads that are irrelevant to my interests. Another feature I'd appreciate is the ability to pause certain types of content if they no longer feel relevant for a particular phase in my life. Right now, I feel like I'm constantly battling irrelevant suggestions.
  Having this level of control over what I see would make my social media experience much more enjoyable. It would reduce the amount of time I spend scrolling through content that doesn't resonate with me, which in turn would allow me to focus on the posts that actually matter. This would make me more likely to use the platform regularly and engage with it more meaningfully.

Q: What do you think about Misinformation on social media? And current Handling Misinformation and Fake News?

- **Blen***:* Misinformation is something I encounter often, particularly on Facebook. I've seen posts shared in parenting groups that promote unproven medical advice, home remedies, or conspiracy theories about vaccines. As a biomedical engineer, I find this troubling because such content could have dangerous consequences, especially for parents who might not have a strong medical background and might take the information at face value.
  I think platforms need to implement stronger tools to address misinformation. For example, a feature that automatically flags posts that contain medical or scientific claims and provides verified resources for users to fact-check the content would be useful. It would also help if there were clear indicators showing the credibility of the source so users could easily differentiate between trustworthy information and unreliable content.

Q: How do you feel about using AI in social media?

- *Blen:* AI has huge potential in social media, especially in helping to curate content that's more relevant to users. I can see how it could help show me posts that match my interests more closely, but I'm also worried about the risks. There's a fine line between helpful recommendations and an echo chamber, where AI only shows me what it thinks I want to see, without exposing me to diverse perspectives or new ideas.

I would want more control over how AI is used to curate content for me. Platforms should allow users to adjust the degree to which AI shapes their feed, and I'd appreciate transparency on how the algorithms work. AI could enhance my experience by personalizing my feed, but I wouldn't want to lose out on new or unexpected content that could broaden my view.

Q: How do you see social media and real-world relationships ?

- *Blen:* Social media helps me stay connected to people I otherwise wouldn't interact with regularly, especially family members and friends who live far away. Facebook has allowed me to maintain relationships that might have otherwise faded over time. However, I do notice that the quality of interactions on social media isn't the same as in-person connections. A like or comment doesn't replace a real conversation, and sometimes it feels like social media gives the illusion of being connected without the depth of real-world relationships.

Follow-up: *Have you ever formed a meaningful relationship via social media?*

- *Blen:* I've formed some meaningful connections through social media, particularly with other mothers in parenting groups. These relationships developed because we shared personal stories, struggles, and tips that helped build a sense of trust and community. What made it possible was the openness of the group and the shared experiences. Without that sense of shared identity, it would have been harder to form real bonds. However, I still prefer real-life interactions for more meaningful relationships because they allow for deeper conversations and emotional connections.

Q: *Are you aware of alternative social medias that existed? Have you tried any of them?*

- *Blen:* I've heard about alternatives like Mastodon and Threads, but I haven't fully explored them yet. What piqued my interest was the idea of having more control over the content I see and fewer intrusive ads. I've been curious about platforms that offer decentralized content or where users have more say in how the community operates, but so far, I haven't been motivated to switch. The convenience and familiarity of Instagram and Facebook keep me there.

Follow-up: what should they need to do to join them ?

- *Blen:* I would try alternative platforms if they could offer a better balance between content control, privacy, and community. However, the main challenge is that most of my social circle is still on Facebook and Instagram, so leaving those platforms feels like I'd be disconnected from the people I care about. If more of my friends and family started using a new platform, I'd be more inclined to follow, especially if it offered better content curation and fewer irrelevant ads.

Q: what is your thought about advertising and monetization on social media?

- *Blen:* I find the ads on social media to be frustrating, especially on Instagram. They often interrupt my feed with irrelevant products or services that I have no interest in. The most annoying part is when I see the same ad repeatedly, even after I've ignored it multiple times. It feels like the platform is prioritizing ad revenue over user experience, and that diminishes my overall enjoyment of the app.

Follow-up: will you subscribe ad free service ?

- *Blen:* I'd definitely consider paying for an ad-free experience on Instagram, especially if the fee was reasonable. Having a feed that's free from distractions and tailored to my interests would enhance my experience and make me more likely to engage with the platform. The current ad-heavy model feels intrusive, and I'd prefer

to have the option to remove those ads in exchange for a subscription or one-time payment.

Q: *Do you feel like social media gives you enough tools to express yourself authentically? Are there any ways you feel limited or misrepresented?*

- *Blen:* Social media gives me some tools to express myself, but they often feel limited. Instagram is great for sharing photos and short captions, but it doesn't offer much space for more in-depth discussions or personal reflections. On Facebook, I can write longer posts, but it still feels like there's a pressure to keep things surface-level. As a working mother, I sometimes want to share more nuanced thoughts on balancing family and career, but I feel like the platforms aren't designed for that kind of content.

Follow-up: *What additional features could help you better express your identity or share your voice on these platforms?*

- **Blen:** I'd like to see more options for long-form content on social media, where I can share deeper reflections without feeling constrained by the format. Maybe a feature that combines images, videos, and text in a more blog-like format would allow for richer storytelling. This would help me express my identity more fully, whether I'm sharing about my professional work as a biomedical engineer or personal moments as a mother.

Q: What motivates you to post creation and sharing?

- *Blen:* When I decide to create a post, I'm usually motivated by a desire to share something important, like a milestone in my daughter's life or a significant achievement at work. Sometimes, I do second-guess myself, especially when it's something personal. I worry about how it will be perceived or if it's too much information to share publicly. I tend to think twice before posting anything that feels too vulnerable or that could invite unwanted attention.
  I think a feature that allows for more control over who sees each post would help alleviate that hesitation. For example, being able to choose specific groups of friends or family members for each post would make me feel more comfortable sharing personal moments without worrying about oversharing or being judged. This kind of privacy control would give me the confidence to post more freely, knowing that the content is reaching the right audience.

Q: *Are you concerned about how your data is used by social media companies? How much control do you feel you have over your personal information?*

- *Blen:* I'm very concerned about how my data is being used on social media, particularly when it comes to the personal information and photos I share. I always wonder if the platforms are using my data to target ads or share with third parties, and I feel like I don't have enough transparency or control over how that happens. I'm especially cautious about posting pictures of my daughter because I don't want them to end up in the wrong hands or be misused in any way.
  I'd feel much more secure if platforms offered stronger privacy settings that clearly showed how my data is being used and allowed me to opt out of certain tracking features. I'd also appreciate more transparency from platforms about what happens to the content I post. For example, a clear explanation of where my data goes, who has access to it, and how long it's stored would give me more peace of mind when using social media.

Q: To improve community building on social media what do you think should be added to to the Design?

- *Blen:* Facebook has some great features for community building, like groups. I've joined a few parenting groups, and they've been incredibly helpful in connecting me with other mothers who are going through similar experiences. These groups feel supportive and provide a real sense of belonging. However, the group features can still feel a bit limited. The interactions within the group are often confined to posts and comments, and I feel like there could be more ways to build meaningful connections.

Follow-up: can you add more to that last point?

- *Blen:* To improve community-building features, I'd love to see platforms integrate more structured, interactive elements within groups. For example, organizing group challenges, live Q&A sessions with experts, or collaborative projects where members can work together on shared interests. Also, having tools that allow group members to form smaller, interest-based subgroups or private chats would help deepen connections. These features would make groups more engaging and foster a greater sense of community beyond just commenting on posts.

Thank you for your time, Blen. If I have any follow-up questions, I will let you know and will likely come by to show you the progress I make.