

Facebook whistleblower reveals identity, says company ‘chooses profits over safety’

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Internal documents published by the *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) recently revealed that Facebook allowed VIPs to break its rules and that it was aware of how Instagram affected the mental health of teens. Now, the whistleblower who brought that information to light has revealed herself as Frances Haugen in an interview with *60 Minutes*, the *New York Times* has reported.

“I’ve seen a bunch of social networks and it was substantially worse at Facebook than what I had seen before,” Haugen told *60 Minutes*. “Facebook, over and over again, has shown it chooses profit over safety.”

Haugen joined Facebook in 2019, working on democracy and misinformation issues, while also handling counterespionage, according to a personal website and Twitter account she and her team set up. She worked as a Facebook product manager and left the company in May.

She first brought “tens of thousands” of pages of internal Facebook documents to Whistleblower Aid founder John Tye, requesting legal protection and help in releasing the information. The trove included internal company research, slide decks, cover letters and

more. She also filed a whistleblower complaint with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), accusing Facebook of taking internal actions that didn't match its public statements.

Whistleblower Frances Haugen is a data scientist from Iowa with a computer engineering degree and a Harvard MBA. She told us the only job she wanted at Facebook was to work against misinformation because she had lost a friend to online conspiracy theories. <https://t.co/csgaRe6k5h> pic.twitter.com/tSNav057As

— 60 Minutes (@60Minutes) [October 3, 2021](#)

In the SEC complaint, Haugen compared Facebook's internal research and documents to public statements and disclosures made by CEO Mark Zuckerberg and other executives. In one example, she said that Facebook contributed to election misinformation and the January 6th US Capitol insurrection.

"Facebook has publicized its work to combat misinformation and violent extremism relating to the 2020 election and insurrection," she wrote in a cover letter on the subject. "In reality, Facebook knew its algorithms and platforms promoted this type of harmful content, and it failed to deploy internally recommended or lasting countermeasures."

The site allows divisive content because it promotes engagement, she noted. "Its own research is showing that content that is hateful, that is divisive, that is polarizing, it's easier to inspire people to anger than it is to other emotions," Haugen told *60 Minutes*. "Facebook has realized that if they change the algorithm to be safer, people will spend less time on the site, they'll click on less ads, they'll make less money."

On top of being in touch with the SEC's whistleblower office, which normally provides protections for corporate tipsters, she and her legal team contacted Senators Richard Blumenthal (D) and Marsha Blackburn (R). She also spoke to lawmakers in France and Britain, along with a member of the European parliament.

Facebook, which has struggled to quell leaks of late, preemptively pushed back ahead of the 60 Minutes interview, calling the accusations "misleading." VP for policy and global affairs Nick Clegg told *CNN* that Facebook represented "the good, the bad and the ugly of humanity" and that it was trying to "mitigate the bad, reduce it and amplify the good." He added that it was "ludicrous" to blame January 6th on social media.

In a statement to Engadget, Facebook spokesperson Lena Pietsch said the "segment also disregards the significant investments we make to keep people safe on our platform... to suggest we encourage bad content and do nothing is just not true." The company also pushed back against any claims it was misleading the public or regulators. "We stand by our public statements and are ready to answer any questions regulators may have about our work."

In the end, Haugen said she wants to help fix Facebook, not see it taken down. “The path forward is about transparency and governance,” she said in the video. “It’s not about breaking up Facebook.” Haugen is set to testify in Congress about issues surrounding Facebook’s impact on young users on Tuesday, December 5th.