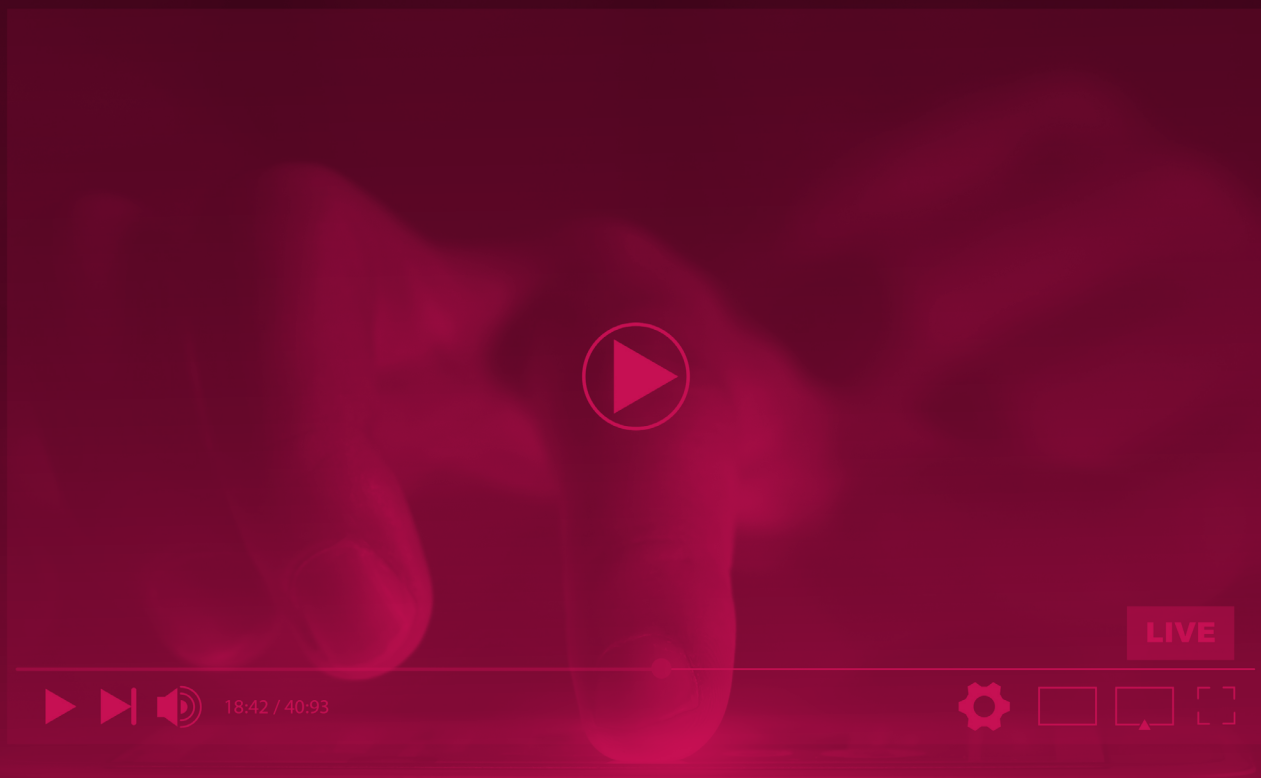


Investigation 2

“Male Lifestyle Guru” Personas

Lucy Cooper





Amman | Berlin | London | Paris | Washington DC

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Executive Summary & Key Findings

The second investigation in ISD's examination of YouTube's recommendation algorithm looked into content recommended to a child and an adult who showed an interest in "male lifestyle gurus". ISD sought to understand what YouTube would recommend to users interested in this subject and if accounts that viewed similar content were recommended different videos based on the age of the persona. To do this, ISD created one account for a 13-year-old boy and another for a 30-year-old man.

Most of the videos recommended more than once to both the child and adult accounts were related to the topic of male lifestyle gurus. Analysis shows that differences in the type of content recommended to the child account compared to the adult, outlined in more detail below, have the potential to lead young users into increasingly toxic content.

The number of videos recommended to the accounts differed, but it is not clear that this disparity was the result of the age of each account. Both the child account and adult account were recommended videos that contained misogynistic and sexually explicit content. This would suggest that YouTube did not prevent age-inappropriate content from being recommended to the child account.

Some of the videos unrelated to male lifestyle guru content that were recommended to the accounts included innocuous videos about music, sports, and religion. However, YouTube also recommended videos with "culture war" topics, such as anti-transgender videos. At least on the surface, these videos are unrelated to male lifestyle gurus, but this suggests that YouTube associates the topics together.

The content recommended to each account was not significantly different, indicating that YouTube did not differentiate between age groups in determining recommendations. There were, however, more differences in the ads served to each account. For example, the adult account was served ads for dating websites, which the child account did not see. The child account was also recommended ads for education, such as university programs, that the adult was not served.

These findings raise questions about how YouTube's algorithms recommend age-inappropriate and misogynistic content to children. That there was

no marked difference between the type of content suggested to ISD's child and adult accounts shows that YouTube may be falling short in preventing exposure of harmful material to children.

Key Findings

- The majority of the most frequently recommended videos shown to both the child and adult accounts were related to the personas' interest in the male lifestyle guru scene. Most of these videos came from channels already watched or subscribed to, or contained content related to male lifestyle gurus.
- Although there were differences in the number of videos and the content of videos recommended to both accounts, there were few indications that this was related to the age of the account. This meant that the child account was recommended age-inappropriate content, including dating advice and videos that sexualized women. There were no age restrictions on the videos or channels.
- Despite Andrew Tate being banned from the platform and neither account watching any content featuring him, YouTube still recommended videos featuring him to both accounts. The child account was recommended more Tate content than the adult account, a clear difference between the content recommended to each persona.
- The content recommended to both accounts that was unrelated to male lifestyle gurus included right-wing news content and videos promoting culture war topics, such as anti-trans rhetoric. Fox News was the fifth most-recommended channel shown to the child account. The consistent recommendation of these videos may suggest that the YouTube algorithm associates male lifestyle videos with socially conservative and/or culture war topics.

Project Overview and Methodology

Parents and teachers across the US and Europe have expressed concern about the proliferation and resonance of misogynist content targeting young boys on the internet.¹ Creators of this content often use more benign topics, such as fitness, to draw viewers into content that includes harmful attitudes towards women and other groups.²

Andrew Tate, a content creator currently awaiting trial on charges of rape, human trafficking, and forming an organized crime group in Romania, has drawn particular concern for his unabashed brand of sexism and misogyny.³ Tate was banned from YouTube, as well as other platforms, in 2022 after an outcry about his content and its growing influence on young boys.⁴ Tate is an extreme example of the kind of toxic content available on YouTube: misogyny veiled in self-help language targeted towards men and boys. For example, Fresh and Fit, one of the channels subscribed to by ISD’s male lifestyle guru accounts, posts content that degrades and insults women as well as calls

for them to have fewer rights.⁵ Fresh and Fit was removed from YouTube’s Partner Program in August 2023 (after this analysis was conducted) for repeatedly violating content policies.⁶

ISD created two YouTube accounts simulating a 13-year-old boy and a 30-year-old man, both based in Illinois. Both accounts showed an interest in male lifestyle content and influencers. According to research, users spend an average of 19 minutes per day on YouTube.⁷ This project aimed to examine the recommendations presented to users after five days of watching YouTube (with watch time over five days averaging 19 minutes per day).

For the accounts to act as similarly as possible to regular users, they engaged in different actions, including searching for channels, searching for specific keywords and phrases, subscribing to channels, and watching videos. A period of scoping research for each persona

Figure 1: Persona-building process for male lifestyle guru personas – both accounts watched the same content throughout the five days.

Content/Channels watched by male lifestyle guru persona (% of total watch time)

Day 1 (16 min watch time)	Search for Joe Rogan	Subscribe to channel	Watch last uploaded video
Day 2 (29 min watch time)	Search for alpha male	Watch first video in results	
Day 3 (12 min watch time)	Search for Jordan Peterson	Subscribe to channel	Watch last uploaded video
Day 4 (21 min watch time)	Search for masculine energy	Watch first video in results	
Day 5 (17 minute watch time)	Search for Fresh and Fit	Subscribe to channel	Watch last uploaded video

was carried out to identify popular channels, keywords, and trends associated with each persona.

The male lifestyle guru personas were created by watching content from popular English-speaking YouTube channels associated with that community. These were Joe Rogan, Jordan Peterson, and Fresh and Fit.⁸ Content associated with phrases popular among the community, such as "alpha male" and "masculine energy", was also watched by these personas.

Figure 1 above outlines the exact actions taken during the persona-building phase.

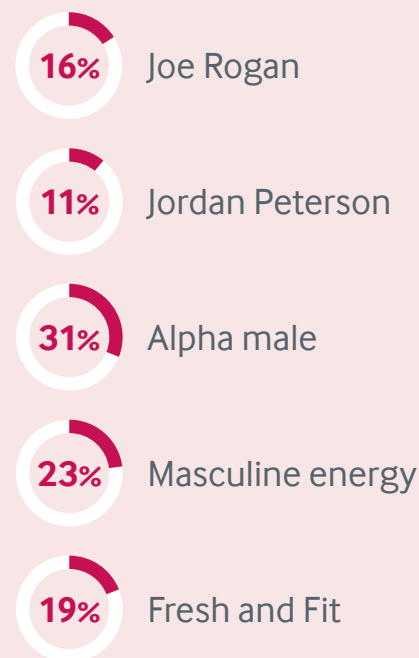
After the fifth day of persona building, a browser automation tool was used to record the recommendations displayed on the homepage of each account every six hours for one month. The coding guidelines below were used to code all videos that were recommended **more than once** to each account and **unique videos** (i.e. videos recommended to one account, but not the other). Analysis was also conducted on the number of videos recommended to each account and on the ads shown to each account.

Coding guideline

- Videos were labeled **subscribed** if they came from a channel the persona had subscribed to: Joe Rogan, Jordan Peterson, and Fresh and Fit.
- Videos were labeled **watched** if they came from an account that was previously watched by the persona.
- Videos were labeled **closely related** if the content was related to content or figures relevant to videos watched by the persona. For example, this category includes compilations of clips of Joe Rogan on another channel.
- Videos were labeled **subject related** if the video contained content about "male lifestyle", such as dating advice or how to be an "alpha male".
- Videos were labeled **unrelated** if the content had no relevance to the persona or its interests, such as music videos.

Figure 2: Content watched by accounts with male lifestyle guru personas.

Content/Channels watched by male lifestyle guru persona (% of total watch time)



Results

Table 1: Differences in the numbers of videos and ads recommended to the child and adult accounts.

	Child account	Adult account
Total no of videos	523	535
Total no of ads	44	30
Videos recommended at least twice	114	150
Unique videos	292	305

Number of videos/ads recommended to each account

Although both accounts watched the same content for the same time and recommendations were collected for the same time period, the adult account was recommended 12 more videos than the child account.

These differences were also seen in the number of ads shown to each account. The child account was shown 44 ads, while the adult account was shown 30.

Although it is difficult to discern a reason for this variance without further information from YouTube, it does suggest that the number of videos and ads recommended to accounts is not consistent and is determined by as of yet unknown factors.

Videos recommended to each account at least two times

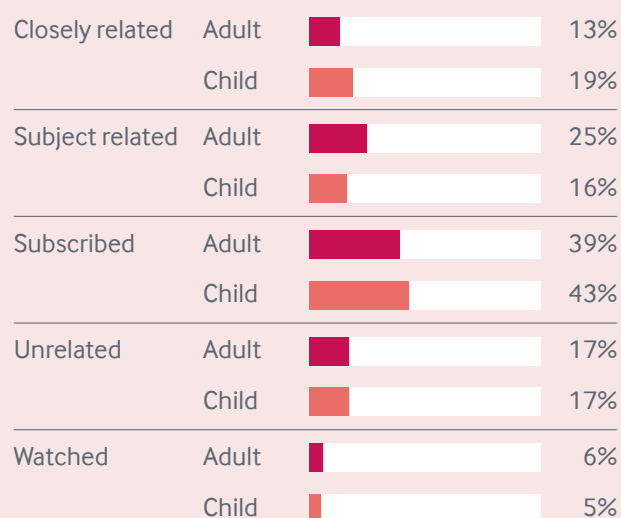
For the child account, 114 videos were recommended at least twice. This number was 150 for the adult. These videos were then coded and analyzed to understand the nature of the content most frequently recommended to each account.

For both accounts, 83% of the videos recommended more than once were related to the personas' interest in male lifestyle gurus, with videos coming from accounts previously watched, subscribed to, or related to such content.

However, some differences emerged between the child and adult personas; the adult account was recommended more videos from channels that they subscribed to than the child account. The child account was recommended more videos that were closely related to the target subjects, potentially leading them to a broader array of

Figure 3: Analysis of videos recommended more than once to each account

Category of videos shown at least twice to each account



male lifestyle influencers. However, the adult account received more recommendations for subject-related videos.

Videos recommended to one account only

The child account was recommended 292 unique videos – videos recommended only to this account and not the adult account – and the adult account was recommended 305 unique videos. These unique videos constituted 55% and 57% of the total videos shown to each account respectively. This suggests that the differing characteristics of each persona led to most of the videos recommended to each account different from the other.

Both accounts were recommended a high number of videos that fit into the unrelated category: 46% of videos recommended to the child account only were unrelated and 42% of the adult account's recommendations were unrelated. However, overall, over half of the unique videos from both accounts were related in some way to the persona of male lifestyle gurus. This is different to the results seen in the teen gamer persona analysis, where most unique videos were unrelated to the teenage gamer persona.

Figure 4: Analysis of unique videos recommended to each account

Unique videos recommended to each persona

Closely related	Adult	<div><div></div></div>	15%
	Child	<div><div></div></div>	28%
Subject related	Adult	<div><div></div></div>	27%
	Child	<div><div></div></div>	19%
Subscribed	Adult	<div><div></div></div>	13%
	Child	<div><div></div></div>	7%
Unrelated	Adult	<div><div></div></div>	43%
	Child	<div><div></div></div>	46%
Watched	Adult	<div><div></div></div>	2%
	Child	<div><div></div></div>	0%

The adult account was recommended significantly more videos from watched channels, meaning videos from channels the accounts had previously watched but did not subscribe to. The child account watched fewer videos from accounts it was subscribed to but more closely related videos, featuring the individuals from the accounts they subscribed to. This could potentially have exposed the child account to more channels that contained similar content and rhetoric to the original male lifestyle guru channels.

When broken down into subcategories (see Table 4a in the Appendix), other differences emerged. The child account was recommended more Jordan Peterson videos than the adult account, both directly from his channel and from other channels featuring Peterson. The adult account was recommended more motivation videos. The adult account was also recommended more videos from Jocko Podcast and Success Chasers, two channels that both accounts watched but did not subscribe to. While the child account was recommended fewer videos from Fresh and Fit, Joe Rogan, and Jordan Peterson than the adult account, these channels made up a greater percentage of the videos recommended to the child than the adult.

Ad Analysis

Analysis was then conducted on the ads recommended to each account. The ads were coded according to the type of content in the ad, with 14 categories emerging: business, dating, education, entertainment, food, health, house, non-profit, military, modelling scout, news, shopping, technology, and travel (see Table 5a in Appendix).

The child account was served 44 individual ads, while the adult account was served 30. For the child, these included ads for a modelling scout, beauty products, and technology products such as VPNs, phones, and ad blockers – none of which were served to the adult. Meanwhile, the adult account was served ads for Facebook, including for Facebook groups and Facebook games; The Daily Wire, a right-wing news website founded by Ben Shapiro; and online dating websites. The ads for online dating websites included titles such as "Ukrainian Dating Site" and "Senior Dating".

Both accounts received the same number of advertisements for the United States border patrol (seen in Image 1 below). The child account was shown more advertisements for Israel flag pins than the adult, as well as a greater range of technology products. The child also received more advertisements for education programs, including more university advertisements than the adult. This could suggest that YouTube is allowing advertisers to serve ads that are catered to the age of the user.

Image 1: An ad recruiting for US Border Patrol seen by the both accounts



U.S. Border Patrol Is Hiring

Earn up to \$20,000 in additional incentives when you become a Border Patrol Agent.

Ad U.S. Border Patrol

Discussion

Misogynistic content was recommended to a child due to a lack of difference between content recommended to child- and adult-aged accounts

As discussed above, there were a number of differences in the number and type of videos recommended to each account. However, there were few indications that these differences were directly related to content moderation on the basis of age, as the videos recommended to the child account were not less explicit or child friendly. The differences could instead have been caused by the slightly different videos each account watched during data collection. The lack of distinct differences between content recommended to the child and adult account meant that unsuitable and sometimes sexually explicit and misogynistic content was recommended to an underage user. This suggests that YouTube’s lack of age-appropriate features and safeguarding could leave children at risk of being exposed to harmful content on the platform.

There were few, if any, videos recommended to the child’s account that catered specifically to their age group. The child account was served recommendations for some TV and movie content; however, much of this content was made for older viewers. For example, the child account was recommended clips of Family Guy episodes and compilations of The Boondocks. These shows are not exceptionally explicit but are targeted primarily at adults.

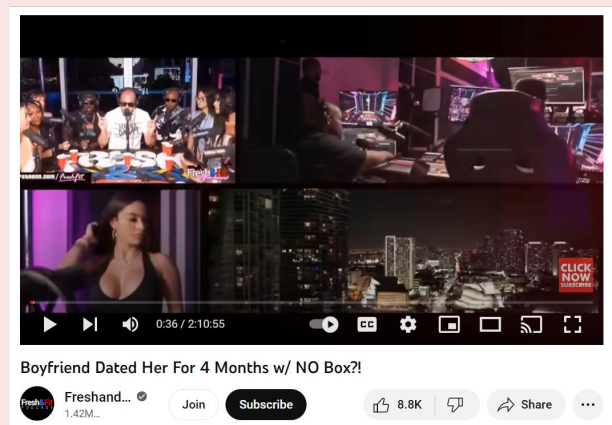
There was a difference in the volume of certain types of content recommended. The child account for example was recommended twice as many closely related videos featuring or about Jordan Peterson than the adult account.

Some of the videos recommended to the child’s account could be considered inappropriate for the age group. Videos with titles such as “Boyfriend Dated Her For 4 Months w/ NO Box?!” and “BE A MAN! START ACTING LIKE AN ADULT - Jordan Peterson Motivation” were recommended to the child account multiple times.

“Boyfriend Dated Her For 4 Months w/ NO Box?!” from the account Fresh and Fit, which both accounts subscribed to, was one of the most frequently recommended videos to the child, recommended seven times. This same video was recommended to the adult account just once.

In the video, a panel of women were interviewed about their dating lives. The hosts of the video questioned the women about their sexual activity and about what they can offer to their partners. They berated some of the women for not sufficiently providing for their partner through cooking or cleaning and criticized their appearance. One commenter said, “Love the fact that you guys make it okay for me to be me man and promote it. I love being an a*****, but I do it in a good way, a loving way.” Others celebrated the fact that one of the women cried and said more women should think like the panelists, who were more accommodating to their male partners.

Image 2: Screenshot of Fresh and Fit video featuring misogynistic content.



This is just one example of the toxic and misogynistic content recommended multiple times to the child account. Other videos recommended to the child account used derogatory terms in the video titles, such as “delusional feminist” and “Black queen”, which while not necessarily racist by itself, was accompanied by racist comments about a Black woman’s behavior and appearance in the video.

A common theme in these videos was ridiculing women, particularly single mothers. Fresh and Fit called single mothers “delusional” and frequently shamed them for having a child while being unmarried. One of their videos recommended to the child account three times was titled “High Value Man Roasts Woman!”.

The news content recommended to both accounts was mostly right-wing/socially conservative

Both accounts were recommended news content and although some of this was completely innocuous, including weather forecasts and daily news bulletins, the most frequently recommended news channel for both accounts was Fox News. In fact, Fox News was the fifth most recommended channel for the child account, and thirteenth most recommended for the adult – an interesting finding considering neither account watched content from Fox News during persona building. For both accounts, much of the Fox News content featured programming from Tucker Carlson, who frequently amplified racist rhetoric and conspiracy theories.⁹

As opposed to the majority of other news content, Fox News served videos that were more sensationalist and sometimes based on opinion. For example, a recommended video from a local news channel was titled “KSAT 12 5 O’Clock News : Feb 13, 2023”, while the Fox News videos had such titles as “Gutfeld: This is the latest Biden scandal”.

The adult account was recommended fewer news videos, all of which were different from the child account. For example, the adult account was recommended more long-form, documentary style news than the child, videos such as “Inside Mexico’s Most Powerful Drug Cartel | Foreign Correspondent” from the channel ABC News In-Depth.

Both accounts were also recommended videos of Tucker Carlson. Although these videos were from Fox News, they were classified as their own category because of Carlson’s unique prominence in political conversation.

The frequency of Fox News recommendations demonstrates that YouTube largely recommended right-wing and conservative news content to both the child and adult accounts, despite neither account initially watching any news videos. This suggests that YouTube associated male lifestyle videos and creators with conservative topics. YouTube also appeared to be serving the child account more political and more opinion-based content rather than news. The child account was recommended 25 unique videos in the news category, much of which constituted culture war opinion content, while the adult account was recommended 11 unique videos.

YouTube recommended content associated with wider “culture war” topics

Both the child and adult accounts were recommended content associated with so-called culture war issues, including videos opposing COVID-19 mitigation measures and videos containing hateful rhetoric towards transgender people. Neither account initially watched videos explicitly about these topics, although creators like Rogan and Peterson do frequently engage with these discussions. This shows that YouTube’s recommendation systems likely associate male lifestyle content with culture war issues and influencers, such as Matt Walsh and Ben Shapiro.

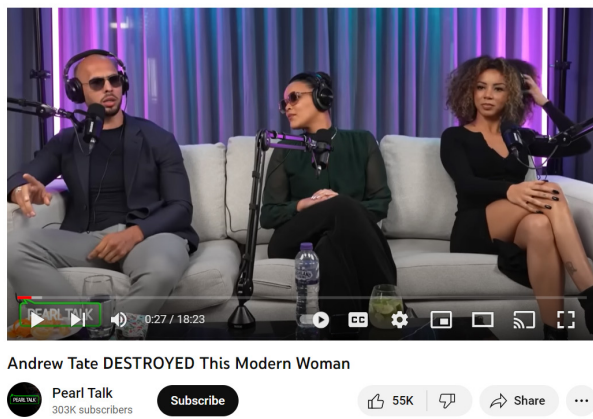
The child account was recommended anti-transgender videos, including a video of Matt Walsh, creator of transphobic documentary *What Is a Woman?*, testifying to the Tennessee State House in favor of restricting access to gender-affirming care for children.¹⁰ In the video he says such care would “castrate, sterilize, butcher, or mutilate” children. Neither account initially watched any videos related to transgender people or gender-affirming care, and the adult account was not recommended similar videos. Other anti-trans videos recommended to the child account referred to “transgenderism”, a term that is considered offensive by LGBTQ+ campaigners.¹¹

Both accounts were also recommended videos by or about Ben Shapiro and from Sky News Australia. Sky News Australia broadcasts conspiratorial content and is frequently cited by extremist actors internationally,¹² and Shapiro regularly contributes to culture war conversations about transgender rights, women’s rights, and broader social justice issues.¹³ There were no videos recommended to either account that were pro-trans or pro-LGBTQ+.

Andrew Tate videos were recommended despite his ban from the platform and neither account watching videos featuring him

Despite his account being banned from the platform last year, content featuring Andrew Tate, a misogynist influencer facing rape and human trafficking charges, was readily available on YouTube and recommended to both the child and adult accounts.¹⁴ The child account was recommended 12 videos featuring Tate, whereas the adult was served only 10. Neither the child nor adult accounts subscribed to channels dedicated to Tate, nor did they initially watch videos about Tate. However, both

Image 3: Example of Andrew Tate content recommended to persona interested in male lifestyle gurus.



accounts were served recommendations for content that prominently featured him.

Content featuring Andrew Tate included videos with titles such as "Andrew Tate DESTROYED This Modern Woman" and "Andrew Tate being a Genius in Money for 13 minutes straight". In the video "Andrew Tate DESTROYED This Modern Women", posted by anti-feminist YouTuber Pearl Davis, Tate blamed women for all the problems men face in modern times. He said women are not "self-accountable" and that society punishes men for not being self-accountable but does not do the same for women. Tate and the other members of the panel also rated women's characteristics, assigning points to women based on whether they could cook for or provide sexual gratification to their male partner. He lectured the panel about what men find interesting in women and said men want women who will impress their male friends.

Appendix

Table 1a: Total videos recommended to each account and the distribution of video recommendations.

Recommendations	Adult (#)	Adult (%)	Child (#)	Child (%)
8	1	0.19	0	0
7	1	0.19	2	0.38
6	4	0.75	1	0.19
5	2	0.37	7	1.3
4	23	4.3	6	1.1
3	34	6.4	27	5.2
2	85	15.9	71	13.6
1	385	71.9	409	78.2
Total	535	100	523	100

Table 2a: Coding of videos recommended more than once to each account.

Category	Adult (#)	Child (#)
Subscribed	58	49
Watched	9	6
Closely related	20	22
Subject related	37	18
Unrelated	26	19
Grand Total	150	114

Table 3a: Breakdown of videos recommended more than once to each account.

Category/Subcategory		Count of # Seen Child	% of Seen Child	Count of Seen Adult	% of Seen Adult
Closely related	Andrew Tate	1	1%	1	1%
	Fresh and Fit	1	1%		
	Joe Rogan	5	4%	5	3%
	Jordan Peterson	16	14%	14	10%
	Motivation	1	1%	1	1%
	Closely related total	24	21%	20	13%
Subject Related	Alpha Male	1	1%		

	Andrew Tate	2	2%	4	3%
	Dating	6	5%	7	5%
	Lifestyle Advice	2	2%	1	1%
	Masculinity	2	2%	2	1%
	Motivation			13	9%
	News			2	1%
	Psychology	1	1%	2	1%
	Religion	1	1%	1	1%
	Technology			1	1%
	Subject Related total	16	14%	35	23%
Subscribed	Fresh and Fit	24	21%	30	20%
	Joe Rogan	11	10%	13	9%
	Jordan Peterson	13	12%	15	10%
	Subscribed total	48	43%	58	39%
Unrelated	AI	1	1%	1	1%
	Comedy	3	3%	4	3%
	Food	1	1%		
	Movies	3	3%	5	3%
	Music	5	4%	5	3%
	Sports	3	3%	9	6%
	TV	2	2%		
	Wealth	1	1%	1	1%
	Entertainment			1	1%
	History			1	1%
	Military			1	1%
	Unrelated total	19	17%	28	19%
Watched	Chispa Motivation	1	1%	1	1%
	Clark Kegley	3	3%	4	3%
	Jocko Podcast			2	2%
	Success Chasers	1	1%	3	2%
	Watched total	5	4%	9	6%
Grand Total		112	100%	150	100%

Table 4a: Analysis of unique videos recommended to each account.

Row Labels		Count of # Seen Child	% of Child Videos	Count of # Seen Adult	% of Adult Videos
Closely related	Fresh And Fit			2	1%
	Joe Rogan	11	4%	19	7%
	Jordan Peterson	74	25%	22	7%
	Motivation			1	0.3%
	Closely related total	86	29%	44	14%
Subject Related	Alpha Male	3	1%	2	1%
	Andrew Tate	12	4%	10	3%
	Anti-feminist	2	1%	1	0.3%
	Dating	9	3%	11	4%
	Health			1	0.3%
	Lifestyle Advice	6	2%	3	1%
	Money	2	1%		
	Motivation	5	2%	39	19%
	Psychology	7	2%	2	1%
	Religion	1	0.3%		
	Technology			1	0.3%
	Wealth	3	1%	4	1%
	Subject Related total	50	17%	74	24%
Subscribed	Fresh And Fit	10	3%	21	7%
	Joe Rogan	5	2%	9	4%
	Jordan Peterson	5	2%	11	4%
	Subscribed total	20	7%	41	13%
Unrelated	AI	2	1%	3	1%
	Animals	1	0.3%	2	1%
	Anti-trans	2	1%		
	Art	1	0.3%		
	Astrology	1	0.3%		
	Ben Shapiro	1	0.3%		
	Comedy	3	1%	6	2%

	Conspiracy	1	0.3%	4	1%
	Entertainment	3	1%	5	2%
	Farming	1	0.3%		
	Food			2	1%
	Gaming	1	0.3%	5	2%
	Health	3	1%	1	0.3%
	History	1	0.3%	3	1%
	Lifestyle Advice	1	0.3%		
	Military	1	0.3%	1	0.3%
	Money			1	0.3%
	Movies	4	1%	6	2%
	Music	20	7%	22	7%
	News	25	9%	11	4%
	Police			1	0.3%
	Psychology	1	0.3%	5	2%
	Racism	1	0.3%		
	Religion	5	2%	1	0.3%
	Science			1	0.3%
	Sports	42	14%	30	10%
	Technology	2	1%	2	1%
	Tucker Carlson	2	1%	4	1%
	TV	8	3%	14	5%
	Wealth	3	1%	3	1%
	Unrelated total	135	46%	133	44%
Watched	Clark Kegley			6	2%
	Jocko Podcast	1	0.3%	7	2%
	Watched total	1	0.3%	13	4%
Grand Total		292		305	

Table 5a: Analysis of the types of ads recommended to each account.

Broad Category	Subcategory	Child Ads	Adult Ads	News	Daily Wire	
Business	Franchise Opportunity		1			1
	HR	1			News Total	1
	Loan	1		Shopping	Beauty	1
	Tax	1			Cars	1
	Business Total	3	1		Clothes	1
Dating	Online Dating		5		Mugs	2
	Dating Total		5		Rental House	1
Education	Culinary School	1		Technology	Soapstone	1
	Elementary School	1			Stickers	1
	Technology Class	1	1		Shopping Total	7
	University	2	1		Ad Blocker	1
	Education Total	5	2		Advertisements	1
Entertainment	Gaming	1	2		AI	1
	Movies	1			App Building	1
	Entertainment Total	2	2		Camera	1
Food	Delivery		1		Facebook	7
	Food Total		1		Graphic Design	1
Health	Diagnostics	1			Maintenance	1
	Health Total	1			Network	1
House	Cleaning	1			Phone	5
	Construction	1			Security	1
	House Total	2			Speakers	1
Israel	Flag Pin	3	1		TV	1
	Israel Total	3	1		VPN	1
Military	Border Patrol	1	1		Wifi	2
	Military Total	1	1		Work	1
Modeling Scout	Model Scout	1			Technology Total	19
	Modeling Scout Total	1			Travel Total	1
				Travel	Adventure	1
				Grand Total		44
						30

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