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## ADAM MOSSERI: CONSTRUCTING INSTAGRAM'S TOP DAD

Tama Leaver  
Curtin University, Australia

### Introduction

US President Joe Biden's 2022 State of the Union address explicitly called out social media for exploiting and monetizing children and their data, stating "we must hold social media platforms accountable for the national experiment they're conducting on our children for profit" (Biden, 2022). Biden's remarks were widely interpreted as targeting Meta, and their Facebook and Instagram platforms in particular (Lima, 2022), especially after the backlash that Instagram experienced a year earlier after announcing it was working on a version of Instagram specifically for children under the age of 13. This backlash only intensified in October 2021, when former Facebook employee, turned whistle-blower, Frances Haugen provided internal company documents and testified that Meta knew Instagram could cause mental health issues for young users (Knowles, 2021). In this context, Head of Instagram, Adam Mosseri is an important figure not just as the person most directly responsible for an Instagram Kids app, but also, I shall argue, in terms of the way he has carefully constructed a public persona as a caring and trustworthy parent, deeply involved in his children's lives, and that this persona has significant strategic value in Meta and Instagram's future chances of deploying Instagram Kids, or something similar.

### Method

Following Marshall, Moore and Barbour (2015), mapping the 'persona' that Adam Mosseri portrays involves a detailed content analysis of all his public facing commentary, output and social media posts (on Instagram and Twitter), as well as utilizing screenshots and video capture to document and capture ephemeral social media traces (Instagram Stories). The latter is especially important as over the two years in question (2020-2021), Mosseri has often used his Instagram Stories to respond to issues Instagram is facing and undertake 'Q&A' sessions where he solicits public questions and responds to around a dozen each week. Given that Instagram Stories content typically disappears after 24-hours, capturing these traces has been particularly important in mapping Mosseri's public persona.

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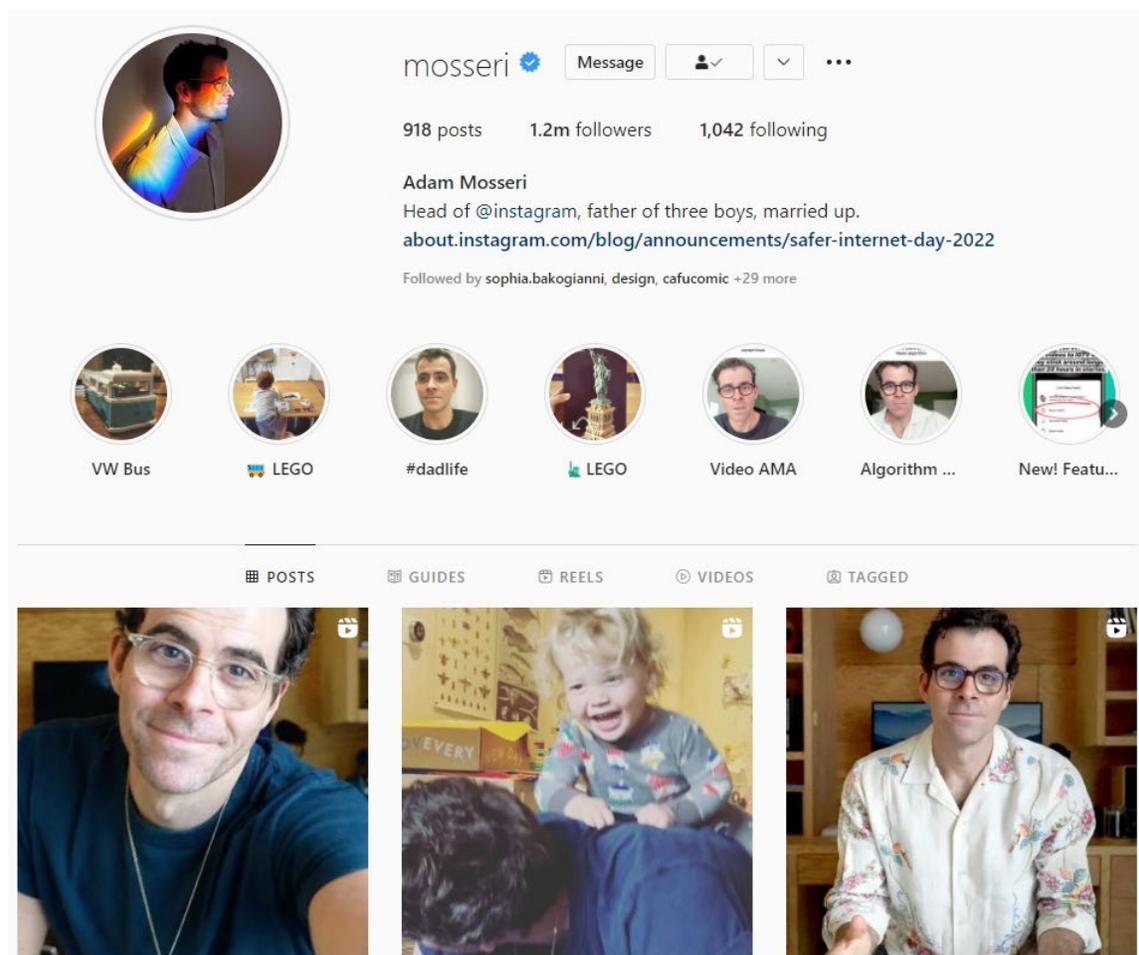


Figure 1. Mosseri's Instagram profile.

## Publicly Parenting

Adam Mosseri's Instagram profile prominently describes him as "Head of @instagram, father of three, married up", emphasizing his role as a parent, while his public posts, Stories and highlights, interweave work and parenting; two of his prominent Stories highlights are labelled, for example, #dadlife and Lego, which feature Mosseri doing Lego builds with his children. This purposeful positioning as an active parent is emphasized on other platforms, too. In a June 2021 Twitter exchange, content creator Casey Neistat (2021) asked Mosseri for "a feature request; a simple elegant way to hide kids' faces when posting pics. i try to keep my kids off of social as much as i can but like to post family photos" to which Mosseri responded "I actually use stickers to cover my kids faces but never thought of product-ing that". Both examples, though, very consciously position Mosseri as an engaged parent, invested in the question of children's privacy. Notably, though, the last Instagram post in Mosseri's main feed which used stickers to cover his older children's faces was posted on 5 April 2021; as the discussion of Instagram Kids ramped up over 2021, Mosseri's stopped using stickers to mask his children's faces in public posts. It is quite possible this was a conscious shift attempting to move attention away from questions of children's privacy, at least in his own feed.



**Figure 2.** Mosseri, 5 April 2021, [https://www.instagram.com/p/CNRCGsvFII\\_/](https://www.instagram.com/p/CNRCGsvFII_/)

## Pausing Instagram Kids

In the face of intense political and media scrutiny (Feiner, 2021), in late September 2021, Mosseri announced that development of an Instagram Kids app would be “paused”. Importantly he emphasized his belief that building Instagram Kids “is the right thing to do”, and that this pause was to allow the company to consult more widely and plan better (Mosseri, 2021). His post emphasized that building ways to allow parents to better supervise younger users on Instagram was still a priority for Instagram’s future. Rather than abandoning the Instagram Kids idea, this announcement remained consistent with Mosseri’s own public persona as a concerned, active parent trying to ensure Instagram empowers other parents to guide their children’s social media use. Notably, this post avoided any discussion about the children’s privacy and data on Instagram.

## The Intimacy of Stories

In Mosseri’s Instagram Stories on 1 October 2021, for example, he chose to answer questions about his work/life balance (he mentioned always seeing his kids in the morning, at least, but wanting to do more), whether he would let his own children use Instagram (he would if as a parent he could control who they interacted with, exactly as the planned Instagram Kids app would have allowed), and posted a story where one of his children interrupted. Posting the story in which his child interrupted is consistent with Crystal Abidin’s (2017) notion of “calibrated amateurism” in which behind-the-scenes or seemingly less polished content is strategically shared specifically to add a sense of authenticity, everydayness and relatability. The overall impact of this particular Q&A session on his Stories is to portray Mosseri as a caring, involved father who has

the best interests of his children at heart. As Head of Instagram, these same Stories emphasise Mosseri's credibility as a father, and thus also try to colour Instagram's pursuit of an Instagram Kids app as a well-intentioned attempt to give parents the tools they need to responsibly shape their children's experience of Instagram.

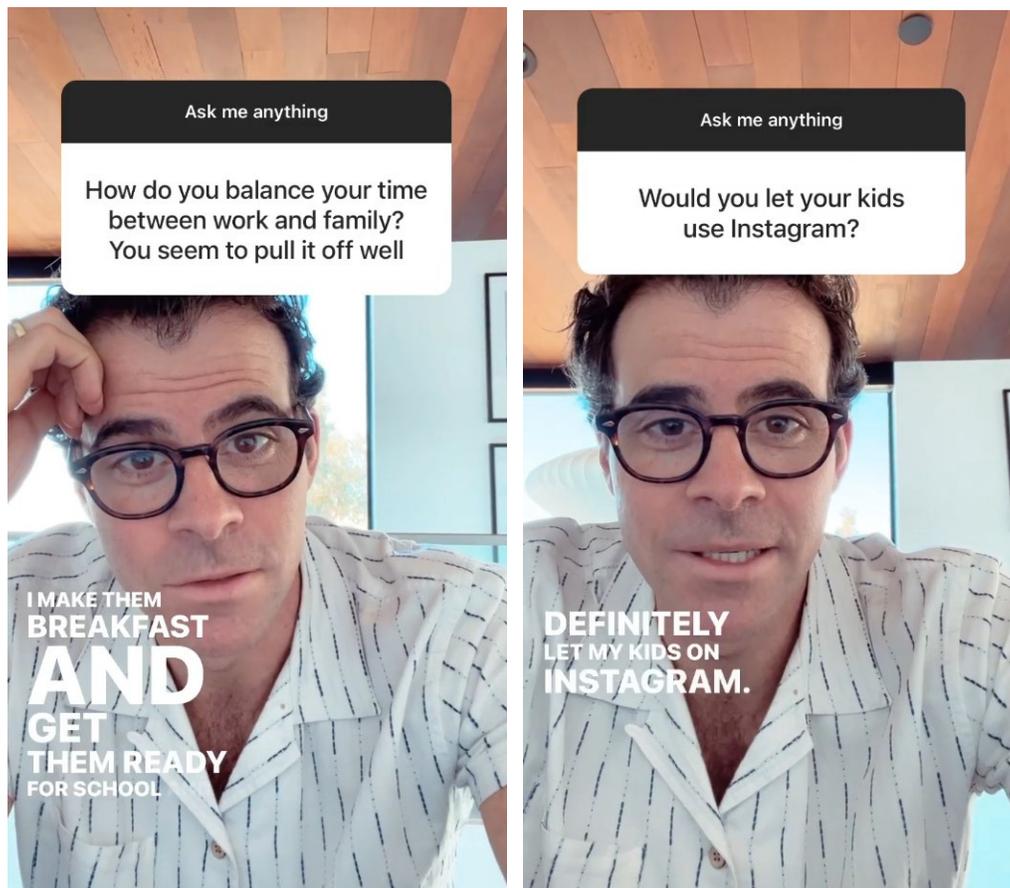


Figure 3. Mosseri, Instagram Stories, 1 October 2021.

## Conclusion

While on one level Adam Mosseri's social media and public commentary could be read as a relatively typical 'authentic' combination of professional and personal elements, as the Head of Instagram his carefully constructed public parent persona is both more managed, and more deliberate. While no public information has been released (at the time of writing) in terms of when Instagram Kids might be unpaused, the political climate in the US and elsewhere in 2022, emphasized in President Biden's 2022 State of the Union speech, suggests any attempt will have meet serious resistance. In the meantime, constructing Adam Mosseri as Instagram's Top Dad is part of a larger, strategic public relations battle to give Meta and Instagram's attempts to create bespoke children's apps credibility

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