

Google And FaceBook Are Targeting Your Kids

Tech giants under fire for aiming their algorithms at the young.

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Google and Facebook are coming after your kids, and it might just serve as a prompt towards regulating the Big Tech goliaths.

Facebook's recently launched Messenger Kids app and a host of content on Google's YouTube service aimed at young children have sparked the ire of advocacy groups who fear the internet titans are mining kids' data in flagrant violation of federal law.

Data Mining Children?

The Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), which became law in 1998, restricts the collection of data on children under 13 years of age, without parental consent. With out-of-control tech giant giants seemingly targeting children, however, activist groups are positing that the COPPA law is being violated.



Eighteen consumer, privacy and public health advocacy groups have **asked** the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to investigate Facebook over its Messenger Kids app. Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood (CCFC) is one of the groups that petitioned the FTC, saying the app's parental consent mechanism can easily be overcome and that its privacy policy is "incomplete and vague."

Messenger Kids is the "first major social platform designed specifically for young children," CCFC Executive Director Josh Golin noted in a statement. He continued:



“While evidence shows that excessive social media use negatively impacts the wellbeing of children and teens, Facebook is trying to get kids hooked at the tender age of five ... They tell parents that Messenger Kids was designed to be safe for children, but they don’t even comply with the most basic privacy requirements of the law.”

Earlier this year, Golin’s organization called for an investigation of Google for claiming its YouTube site was only for people 13 years and over and then flooding the site with content obviously aimed at children much younger.

“For years, Google has abdicated its responsibility to kids and families by disingenuously claiming YouTube – a site rife with popular cartoons, nursery rhymes and toy ads – is not for children under 13,” Golin **said** at the time.

Jeff Chester, Executive Director of the Center for Digital Democracy, added that Google “has acted duplicitously by falsely claiming in its terms of service that YouTube is only for those

who are age 13 or older, while it deliberately lured young people into an ad-filled digital playground.”

Pompous Disdain

This kind of arrogance may be Google’s undoing. An article in U.K. newspaper *The Guardian* openly called for “today’s robber barons” Facebook and Google to be regulated. Author Toby Walsh **sneers**:

“The managers of YouTube know that millions of children are watching its videos. Search for ‘kids’ videos on YouTube and you get over 177m results. Or check out the official Sesame Street, National Geographic Kids or Peppa Pig channels on YouTube. These clearly aren’t aimed at adults.

“Google is using the information it collects on YouTube to sell adverts targeted at children. Google doesn’t want to fix this because it makes a lot of money out of having children watch YouTube and collecting information on them.”

Reining Them In

If Facebook and Google are proven to have violated the COPPA law protecting children’s privacy, they should be punished to the maximum extent that law provides. But there is a greater hope that the use of COPPA to rein in these Big Tech behemoths can be an example for further regulation that protects all Americans from the data mining excess that plagues cyberspace.

The Center for Digital Democracy’s Jeff Chester, along with Kathryn C. Montgomery, a professor of communications, **penned** an op-ed in *The Hill*

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addressing this very issue. They show that the burgeoning tech industry of the 1990s used “free market” language in an attempt to place themselves above any and all regulation, with disastrous results for the rest of us:

*arrogance may
be Google's
undoing.*

“From the beginning, the tech industry argued that self-regulation would effectively safeguard consumer privacy, devising dozens of guidelines and codes of content that promised ‘consumer choice’ over their ‘privacy preferences.’ But none of these various regimes has had any meaningful impact on the growth of what has become a complex and pervasive commercial surveillance system.”

The nightmarish growth of this complex surveillance system is easy to see for anyone with open eyes. Chester and Montgomery note that “To this date, COPPA is the only Federal Internet privacy law on the books.” Meanwhile, data collection by tech giants has grown to astronomical proportions. COPPA could very well be the foot in the door for **needed** regulation of greedy, **reckless** and arrogant internet mega-corporations like Facebook and Google.