

Meta Settlement Fails to Protect Teens

Meta's landmark settlement with dozens of State Attorneys General over social media harms does not address the company's pernicious surveillance business model that harms all internet users. Young people should have safe online spaces to flourish, but this settlement does not create them. Instead, the settlement includes numerous efforts to burden teens' access to its platforms and incentivizes industry-wide adoption of surveillance measures across platforms like TikTok, Snap and YouTube. The settlement does not touch Meta's information extractive profit making and allows Meta to write the rules of the road for kids' online safety.

Age Assurance Requires Even More Surveillance

The settlement requires Meta to be better at confirming its users' ages through a process known as age assurance. This system will not make teens safer – it will do the opposite by requiring the company to collect and retain even more data about all users than they already do to determine who is a teen. The data minimization and security protections are lacking – the settlement does nothing to limit Meta from using teens' data to target ads, and it allows Meta to decide how long it can retain personal data. The only data protection is exclusive to users 13 and under, who are already protected by existing law.

The behavioral advertising that drives Meta's profits should be banned. Meta pervasively tracks what all its users do online – across different apps, websites, and services – to build profiles of them and target them with ads. This surveillance-based ad system is the core privacy harm to users of all ages, yet the settlement doesn't address it. A serious effort to protect young people online would start by limiting this tracking, not more surveillance.

The Path Forward

Addressing young people's safety online is a complex, multi-faceted issue that lawmakers should address by prohibiting invasive surveillance practices that harm everyone's privacy. Lawmakers should also explore ways to mandate that services provide all users with more options to protect their privacy and to customize their experiences online. These efforts would go a long way to helping parents, families, and young people. Allowing Meta to negotiate self-dealing terms —and then push those standards onto the rest of the industry—doesn't address these harms. Parents and teens need meaningful tools and choices, not one-size-fits-all restrictions with increased surveillance.

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