

E safety Update



1. 'Adults don't get it': why TikTok is facing greater scrutiny warn.

June 2019

The most downloaded app on the App Store for the last year makes almost no money, is barely understood by anyone over 25, and has already faced investigations, fines and bans on three continents. TikTok's success has taken regulators, parents and its competitors by surprise. But with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) in the UK now investigating the company over its handling of young users' private data, can reality catch up with the viral smash?

At its core, TikTok is a video-sharing app. Users film themselves in 15-second clips, typically set to music, and upload them to be viewed by followers and strangers alike. If it seems like it came out of nowhere, that's because in part, it did: the app as it is today is a merger of the original TikTok, which was launched internationally in September 2017, and the earlier viral sensation Musically.

"The app itself offers something no other app does and that's why it has become so successful: paid acquisitions just help more people know about it," she said. "Young people are fed up with the narcissistic influencer movement on other channels, seeing 'the perfect life', 'the perfect body', the 'perfect relationship' and that's why they've moved to TikTok."

But with increased scale has come increased scrutiny. In February, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in the US fined the company \$5.7m (£4.2m) for collecting the personal data of children under 13 without parental consent. In April, TikTok was banned in India, where it claims to have more than 120 million monthly active users, over concerns that the app was being used to share sexually explicit material. The ban was lifted a week later.

The ICO is investigating because of the same data protection concerns as the FTC, but with additional focus on the controls available on the app's direct messages. The UK watchdog fears that adults are able to send private messages to children they do not know.

It is the ability to live stream that worries the NSPCC and others.

"We know that a worrying number of children are being contacted via livestreaming apps, such as TikTok, by adults who use them as a gateway to groom and harm young people," said a spokesperson for the charity. "Our research found that that a quarter of 40,000 children (seven- to 16-year-olds) have livestreamed online with someone they have never met, and one in 20 children had been asked to take their clothes off."

The NSPCC's research has been backed up by other investigations. Young, female users of TikTok regularly report creepy or intrusive replies to their videos, according to BuzzFeed news site, and bemoan the failure of ByteDance to respond.

The problem is worsened by the nature of the app: rather than prioritising the videos of people you follow, it instead guides users to the fully algorithmic "for you" feed. "If some creepy guy just keeps liking videos of younger girls doing similar audios or soundtracks or hashtags, those are going to keep coming up on his 'for you' page," one user told BuzzFeed.

While the lack of moderation is concerning some users, particularly when it comes to child safety, it is the opposite that concerns others. As a Chinese startup, ByteDance has a very different conception of what it means to be a social media company than the Californian tech firms that have dominated the field until now.

Link: https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/jul/05/why-tiktok-is-facing-greater-scrutiny-video-sharing-app-child-safety?CMP=share_btn_tw

2. Chinese social media app investigated over child grooming fears

June 2019

A Chinese social media platform popular with children is being investigated by the Information Commissioner after it received a number of complaints.

Parents, teachers and children's charities have expressed fears about TikTok and the potential dangers it could pose for children.

The Commissioner has launched the investigation to address fears it could be a platform for paedophiles and groomers.

Users of the app can use it to share videos with friends, but there is the suggestion it has been used as a site to target users, reports the Mirror.

Parents have already been issued warnings by schools about the app after fears were expressed it is a "hunting ground" for paedophiles.

The Chinese-owned app, worth up to £55billion, claims it is "raw, real, and without boundaries".

In India, the app was considered so open and transparent that it banned the app from being downloaded because of fears it encourages paedophiles.

A similar ban could occur in the UK if the commission finds it unsafe for its young users.

Appearing before MPs on the culture select committee Commissioner Elizabeth Denham said: "We are investigating a company named TikTok.

"We are looking at the transparency tools for children, the messaging system, the kind of videos collected and shared by children online."

Child safety expert John Carr warned that the app is "a magnet for paedophiles".

Already, in the US the company has already been fined £4.3million for collecting data on children including their names, locations and email addresses.

'Social networks have made little progress'

Andy Burrows, NSPCC Head of Child Safety Online Policy said: "The Information Commissioner's investigation into TikTok, and whether its site design puts children at risk of grooming and abuse, is significant.

"Social networks have made little progress in protecting children on their platforms so it is imperative that the new Prime Minister makes this a priority and the Government now works swiftly to build on its bold and ambitious proposals and brings in legislation that will make the UK the safest place for children to be online.

"Recent research also showed us that 9 out of 10 children and parents also agree tech firms should have legal responsibility to keep young users safe."

Link: <https://www.kentlive.news/news/uk-world-news/chinese-social-media-app-investigated-3050367>