



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA

Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement

Inquiry into law enforcement capabilities in relation to child exploitation

Public Hearing – 26 July 2023

Questions on notice

TikTok

1.

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: Is it about two per cent of users that are being scraped off every quarter?

Ms Woods-Joyce: I'd have to check the figures. That may be correct. I'm not sure, sorry.

Response

Globally, TikTok has over 1 billion active monthly users.

- In Q1 2023, 16,947,484 accounts suspected to be under the age of 13 were removed globally.
- In Q4 2022, 17,877,316 accounts suspected to be under the age of 13 were removed globally.
- In Q3 2022, 19,690,699 accounts suspected to be under the age of 13 were removed globally.
- In Q2 2022, 20,575,056 accounts suspected to be under the age of 13 were removed globally.

2.

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: All of those are quite proper in order to protect young people, but the problem is that a young person can just assert that they are 18 or 19 and get immediate access to all of those features. That is a big security problem, isn't it? It's a big potential loophole for exploitation, isn't it? I'm not saying it's limited to TikTok. I could put the same concerns about Amazon's Twitch and other accounts. But it is a very real concern, isn't it?

Ms Woods-Joyce: I share your concerns around safety. That's absolutely why we invest so heavily in our processes and our people. I am happy to come back to the committee if there are additional pieces of information that I can provide that speak to age and access. We do have those structured experiences for teens depending on their age.

Another thing we try to do is empower families to have these conversations with their teens. We want to give them tools to make that process easier. We have a family pairing feature, for example, that allows a parent to link their account to that of their teen's.

Response

TikTok is fully committed to enforcing our age policies and deploys a range of mechanisms and safeguards to ensure users have an age-appropriate experience. This includes:

- Setting the minimum age of our App in the Apple App Store as 12+ and Google Play Store at "Parental Guidance Recommended" so that parents can simply block their children from



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downloading TikTok in the first place.

- Requiring users to declare their age via a neutral age gate that does not provide any signal to users of the minimum required age. If they fail the age gate, we do not specifically tell them this is because they are not old enough.
- Allowing users to report an account when they think a user is underage.
- Training our moderators to flag any suspected underage accounts with a specialist team who will make an assessment about whether a user is likely to be in violation of our age policy. As the figures in our enforcement report show, we are removing these users aggressively, and at notable scale.

When our teams believe that an account may belong to an underage person, the account will be suspended.

TikTok acknowledges existing industry-standard age verification systems have their limitations. We are committed to working with industry peers, regulators, and key stakeholders to find industry-wide solutions that further improve methods to detect and remove underage users, while also respecting user privacy and adhering to the Australian Privacy Principles.

3.

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: Are you aware of any jurisdiction which has an effective centralised age verification system which would have the benefit of having a bunch of the data and the documents in only one very secure place but which would allow you to access that information and to verify the age of account holders? Are you aware of any jurisdiction where that works?

Ms Woods-Joyce: I'm not aware of it. I'm happy to go back and check with our teams. We are, as you know, a global platform. There may be some other markets that could provide some assistance there, but offhand I'm not aware of any, no.

Response

Across the markets where TikTok is available, we are not aware of any centralised system of collecting personal identification documentation for the purpose of enabling age verification functionality on social media platforms.

TikTok understands multiple jurisdictions across the globe are considering different approaches to how online age verification processes could be improved, including in Australia. Some jurisdictions are also developing or have already implemented digital identity systems.

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4.

CHAIR: Final question: in relation to the Online Safety Act 2021, have you got any comments in relation to how effective it is or any recommendations to the committee about how it can be strengthened going forward? If you could take that on notice, please.

Response

The Online Safety Act is still relatively new.

For example, we are just seeing components of the Act coming into play, including registration of the Online Safety Codes and the second round of Basic Online Safety Expectations.

We think it's important that reforms like this are given time to operate, to test that they're working as intended, and, as needed, to be adjusted thereafter.

Our engagement with the Commissioner and her team is very proactive and effective. Typically speaking, we are all collectively working for the same outcome in improving safety for our Australian community.