

24141 **Meta calls for parental control laws for under-16s**

Tom Gerken, bbc.com, 15 November 2023

Meta has called for laws that would force app stores to get parental approval when a child downloads an app. The proposal would put app stores, like those run by Apple and Google, on the hook for implementing parental controls - rather than social media companies.

Meta, owner of Instagram and Facebook, has faced criticism for how it handles teens using its platforms.

The firm's safety chief called for a "simple, industry-wide solution" to govern children's social media use. "Parents should approve their teen's app downloads, and we support federal legislation that requires app stores to get parents' approval whenever their teens under 16 download apps," said Meta's global head of safety, Antigone Davis, in a blog post published Wednesday. "With this solution, when a teen wants to download an app, app stores would be required to notify their parents, much like when parents are notified if their teen attempts to make a purchase.

"Parents can decide if they want to approve the download... they can also verify the age of their teen when setting up their phone, negating the need for everyone to verify their age multiple times across multiple apps."

The post comes as the firm faces mounting lawsuits related to its handling of child and teen use and a week after a whistleblower told the US Congress that he believed Instagram was not doing enough to protect teens from online harm. He said his 14-year-old daughter faced sexual advances on Instagram, and he believed Meta needed to do more to combat the problem.

Meta has previously said it has introduced "over 30 tools" to support a safe online environment.

But politicians in the US are increasingly opting to pass local laws to address the problem, which could lead to a more complicated legal framework for Meta and other firms to navigate.

In March, Utah became the first state in the US to require social media firms get parental consent for children to use their apps.

Meta said it was calling for a national law.

"As an industry, we should come together with lawmakers to create simple, efficient ways for parents to oversee their teens' online experiences," Ms Davis said.

Social media companies are also facing a raft of growing regulation worldwide.

Ms Davis said placing the responsibility for parental controls on app stores would also "help to preserve privacy" by limiting how many individual companies collected "potentially sensitive identifying information".

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