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While it may appear that policies are created and implemented to serve a specific purpose, they tend to be rooted in different areas and issues and serve more than just their literal purpose. The Age Verification Policy appears to have been created and implemented to protect minors from accessing inappropriate sites on the internet, but in reality, this policy was influenced by multiple social factors and impacted society in more ways than simply restricting access to websites.

Some of the biggest social implications that have arisen from this cybersecurity policy are whether or not this policy is reducing parental choice and restricting marginalized communities from access to safe spaces due to age restrictions. In today's world, parents have the right to decide what their children can access and what platforms they find appropriate to use as well. Some options that parents have to monitor and restrict what their children access are by using “filters or blocking software for certain apps and websites on devices” (Weissmann, 2023). In the attempt to protect all minors from all websites and apps deemed “inappropriate”, eliminates parents having any say on what their children can access. Besides removing parental choice, it brings the issue of how and who has the say on what sites and apps need the users to be at a minimum of 18 years old to access and use.

The other social issue that this policy has introduced has been removing access to safe spaces online for young, marginalized communities, specifically LGBTQ+ youth. Many adolescents who identify as LGBTQ+ already struggle enough to get the support and understanding to navigate some of the challenges they will encounter and tend to rely on social media and sites for support and guidance. This is especially true with adolescents who live in conservative homes or areas. Restricting access to these types of platforms can result in not only removing needed resources for these adolescents but it can also create “a direct line of isolation

(Gutierrez, 2023) which can be extremely harmful and possibly deadly.

The greatest connection between society and the Age Verification Policy is the responsibility of protecting minors, a responsibility that lands on everyone. Technology is so intertwined in today's world that the government feels obligated to minimize the risks of minors either being exposed to harmful content or being a target. Many politicians have spoken on this issue and continue to relate policies like these are needed to protect our children, with an emphasis on “our”. This personal responsibility for the entire country has contributed greatly to the push and support behind this policy. As a justification, policymakers have argued that giving up some privacy in order to better protect minors seems like a fair tradeoff (Dixon, 2024).

Snapchat, TikTok, and Instagram are well-known social media platforms across the country and to people of all ages, including minors. Some social and cultural factors that led to the creation and shaping of this policy have been the negative effects that social media had on adolescents and social media platforms becoming an easier means for child predators to take advantage of minors. An increase in crimes against children has become a serious issue for our country and culture, leading to the need for policies like this one. In many of these cases, children and their families have been targeted through the use of social media, making access to these types of platforms a concern. Mental health concerns have also become the center of attention with social media usage being linked to depression and anxiety in young teenagers. The amount of time spent on these types of platforms has also been linked to an increase in the risk of harm to youth as well. Situations like these have caused victims and communities to request more from their government when it comes to protecting minors and regulating apps (Harris, 2024). Understanding what is going on socially allows us to better understand why certain policies are being put in place and they also allow us to see how they are being shaped.

Resources

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Weissmann, S. (2023, August 07). *Age-verification legislation doesn't do what legislators say it will*. R Street Institute. <https://www.rstreet.org/commentary/age-verification-legislation-doesnt-do-what-legislators-say-it-will/>