

LICENSE TO SCROLL: REACTIONS TO YOUTUBE ID CHECKS

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INTRODUCTION + SURVEY BACKGROUND

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Governments around the world are passing misguided laws that require people to submit to age verification and ID checks in order to access online content. In July this year, the U.K.'s "Online Safety Act" (UKOSA) went into effect, requiring platforms to implement age checks to keep young people from accessing adult websites and content. In the U.S., laws in several states including Louisiana, Indiana, and Virginia require people to provide government ID to access certain apps and websites. As these laws spread, tech companies are increasingly considering options for how to comply. Conversely, advocates and activists continue to raise the alarm that laws such as UKOSA will only exacerbate censorship and surveillance online. This misguided measure will force people to hand over sensitive data just to access the Internet, and asks people to trust companies with known track-records of exploitation and data breaches.

On July 25, 2025, YouTube announced^{iv} it would roll out its own form of ID checks using AI, a form of pre-compliance that set a dangerous precedent for all online platforms. The way it works: YouTube uses surveillance tech (like your detailed search and watch history) in combination with AI to "estimate" peoples' ages, and if the AI system is wrong, the only way to correct it is by uploading a credit card or government ID to verify your age^v. This is the backdrop of a member survey conducted by Fight For the Future^{vi}, gauging people's attitudes and experiences with YouTube's new ID checks. In what follows, this report will highlight repeated themes in the survey and showcase several individual anecdotes that speak to the underlying fears, concerns, and motivations prevalent throughout the responses.

SUMMARY FINDINGS

This survey received an overwhelming response from members, with hundreds sharing detailed experiences and reactions to YouTube's newest policy roll out. The responses came directly from the "censorship reporting" tool found on Fight For the Future's webpage about Youtube's new ID checks, and from petition signers who opted to fill out a post-action questionnaire.

Boycotting Youtube over decision

- 21 respondents said they have or would proactively boycott over the new policy, citing various concerns and fears.

Dozens report been prompted to verify their age

- Even more have yet to encounter it, but still share serious concerns.

Censorship + privacy concerns with the policy

- A few respondents have already been affected by Google/ Alphabet data breach and shared first hand skepticism with YouTube's ability to safeguard verification data.

Negative impacts on creators

- Over 200 respondents self-identified as content creator. One content creator in particular shared that their content was being consistently "limited even after verifying my ID 3 times."

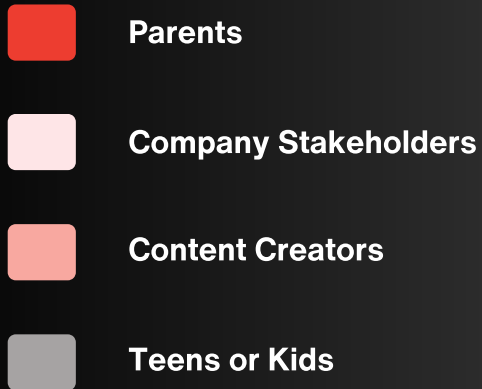


BY THE NUMBERS

1073

Who Are They?

Number of individuals that filled out the survey



454

respondents who submitted specific experiences with or reactions to the ID checks

21

respondents that mentioned boycotting Youtube in protest to the ID checks

#AGEGATE STORIES + REACTIONS

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Yes they already tried to take away my daughter's curated YouTube profile on our family plan. We carefully select what she watches and the "youtube kids" version they're trying to force us to use is awful and filled with crap we don't want her watching. Add to that we pay for YouTube premium monthly and should be able to watch what our family wants to watch in the first place.



**Frustrated parent with
Youtube's decision**

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Open internet advocate



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While YouTube has not yet required verification of my age, I worry a lot that engaging with things I'm nostalgic for or have loved since childhood might cause it to compromise my right to privacy. I'm watching or listening to Youtube nearly 24/7, for grounding my anxiety or keeping my mind going, and the potential for my interests to flag me as a child just makes it difficult to enjoy things comfortably. I don't believe this will identify kids nearly as much as it will mis-identify adults, and I feel that the solution to children's safety on the internet is not to censor and lock down the entire internet, but to create, maintain, and moderate separate safe spaces specifically for children. You wouldn't childproof an entire mall; you'd make spaces for children and give parents the responsibility to get them to those spaces. I feel the internet should be similar in that way, for the benefit of everyone.

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I've been boycotting YouTube since the verification took effect. I haven't used it since August 13th, and won't use it until the verification is lifted. I've had my YouTube account since I was ten, and I watch a lot of content that could be considered for kids. I no longer have access to the movies I've bought, but it's a small price to pay for keeping my ID out of a company's hands.

The boycotter

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I use YouTube regularly and have not yet been affected by this. Many of the creators and videos I watch through YouTube touch on LGBTQ+ themes and topics on a regular basis and they have been some of the first to be affiliated by algorithmic censorship in the past. This change would be unacceptable.

Risk of LGBTQ+ censorship



Fearful of data leaks and hardships on content creators



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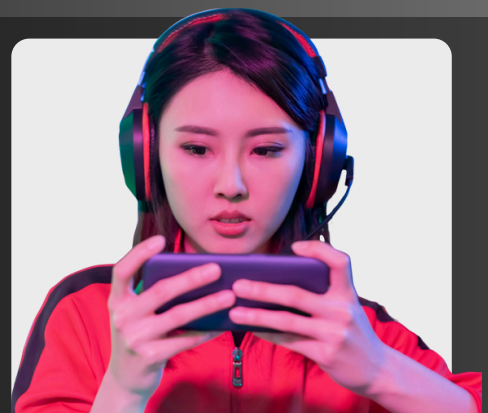
Falsely flagging in either direction costs a lot of people who rely on YouTube for income to lose money. I also despise the idea that the internet is becoming the worlds' shittiest kindergarten, that lies about trying to protect kids while making everything harder and dangerous for everyone. Additionally, asking for people's ID as a corporation is absolutely disgusting. There was recently a leak of a large group of women's information online because everything was stored on the god-forsaken Cloud. How am I supposed to trust that YouTube won't treat my personal information in the same way?

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Not yet, but even the threat of it happening is enough to make me wary of using the platform. Some of the videos I watch could be considered kid-friendly and I worry I'll get flagged, even though I'm an adult.

Adult concerned with being wrongly flagged



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CONCLUSION

Whether parents, content creators, or people looking to access the internet freely and openly, many of the respondents rightly express a concern for privacy and the potential of detrimental consequences-- regardless of whether they'd been asked to verify accounts. As companies amass more data, it opens up greater threats and opportunities for misuse of verification data. And this threat is not hypothetical—ICE and other federal agencies are already criminalizing student protestersⁱ over their social media activity. Age verification would give companies and governments more unfettered access and surveillance of our digital lives. Without guardrails, as we've seen with other tech conglomerates, YouTube could connect this data (like information about what videos we watch) with our government IDs, and share that with law enforcement, or sell of to unsavory third parties such as data brokers. This places considerable risk onto marginalized groups and individuals looking for vital resources and community online.

As these survey reactions to #AgeGate demonstrate, age checks ironically can be catastrophic to certain groups' safety online, and jeopardize the fight to free expression online. We believe a journalist should be able to do research without leaving a paper trail. A queer person or parent of a trans kid should be able to look up information about sexuality or gender affirming healthcare without fear of a search being tied to their identity. A pregnant person in a state with an abortion ban should be able to look up abortion funds without being surveilled. A content creators should not have to reduce their potential audiences and self censor.

RECOMMENDATION

1. YouTube should roll back its harmful internal policy to institute online ID checks immediately. The company must consider the dangerous precedent it is setting for others and stop collecting sensitive personal data preemptively from its users and creators to appease lawmakers.
2. Tech companies and other platforms must embrace policies that truly keep their communities safe from harm and censorship. This means adhering to strict data minimization principles, instituting strong data protection measures, and not collecting additional sensitive data on people especially if it's not critical to delivering a particular service.
3. Lawmakers should reconsider dangerous and ineffective legislative proposals like KOSA that place vulnerable communities further at risk of surveillance and censorship. Online censorship cannot and should not be used to solve social issues like kids safety, as it only serves to stifle free expression, limit youth and adults' access to critical resources and information, and potentially expose adults to further harm. Instead, lawmakers should redirect this energy towards creating real privacy safeguards for all Americans, protecting free and public access to the internet, and investing in high-quality resources to help youth navigate and enjoy the best the web has to offer.

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