The Age Appropriate Design Code in Action

September 2, 2023 marked the second anniversary of the Age Appropriate Design Code (AADC) taking effect in the UK. The influence of the AADC, and its impact on children's online privacy and safety, has continued to grow.

Since the AADC's introduction, many of the world's largest tech companies have introduced changes to the design of their services to better align with rights and needs of children as prescribed by the Code. From turning off tracking and geolocation to introducing positive nudges and better transparency, the AADC has been the catalyst for important changes for children online.

Default settings: Many services have made changes so that children and teens' accounts are set to high privacy settings by design and default.

The **Google Play Store** now prevents children from viewing and downloading adult-only rated apps.

YouTube turned off autoplay for children. It also turned on break and bedtime reminders as default settings.

TikTok does not push notifications to children ages 13 to 15 after 9 p.m., and does not send push notifications to children ages 16 to 17 after 10 p.m.

Instagram and **TikTok** have disabled direct messages between children and adults they do not follow.

Google made SafeSearch the default browsing mode for users younger than 18.

Source: POLITICO reporting

For example: **Instagram** now automatically sets the accounts of users under the age of 16 to private during initial account set-up, and adults can no longer direct message young people who do not follow them. **Snapchat** turns all under 18 accounts to private by default, meaning they do not appear as browsable public profiles. **Google** turns *SafeSearch* on by default for all under 18s. **YouTube's** default upload settings have been changed to the most private setting for under 18s and **Pinterest** now has notifications switched off by default and users are not pressured to switch them on. **TikTok** automatically applies a 60 minute screen time limit to all accounts belonging to people under 18.

Greater user control: Alongside default settings, many services have unveiled further user controls to help users manage and curate their own experience:

For example: **Twitter** expanded its *Safety Mode*, which blocks accounts who send abusive messages from following the recipient for seven days. Twitter will now proactively scan Tweets for abusive content, and positively nudge recipients to turn on Safety Mode. **Among Us** now grants users the opportunity to manage data collection at sign up and in game, including the option to turn off a personalized game experience and opt out of data collection. **YouTube** has also introduced "positive nudges" by introducing a 'new to you' feature that encourages users to diversify the content they view - to "go beyond your usual videos."

Transparency and Empowerment tools: A number of services have taken steps to introduce community and privacy policies accessible to children - by either making them easier to understand or making them more engaging with images and cartoons. Services have also announced they will introduce greater empowerment tools, giving users greater ability to customize their settings and experiences.

For example: **Discord** launched a *Safety Center* that clearly defines community rules and regulations in age-appropriate language and what actions users can take to monitor and manage their use of the service and seek redress. **King**, a prominent game publisher with 16 games listed on the Apple and Google app stores, has produced a gamified version of its privacy policies to educate their users on their data practices. **Meta** updated its privacy policy, changing the format, breaking up the text, using more understandable language and making use of illustrations and videos. **Spotify** has for the first time published its platform rules, setting out which content is prohibited and the consequences of uploading such content, with signposting for users on how to report any potential violations. On **Pinterest**, children in the UK will not be shown ads and their data will not be shared or used outside the service.

In terms of empowerment tools, **Meta** will be making its reporting options more easily accessible, and **Snapchat** will allow all users to turn off tracking content personalisation.

Recognition of evolving capacities: Many of the positive changes have included a recognition of 'evolving capacities' with products adapting safeguards for different age groups.

For example: **Google** has developed engaging and easy-to-understand materials that will help children and their parents understand Google's data practices in an age-appropriate way, with options for 6–8-year-olds, 9–12-year-olds and 13–17-year-olds. **TikTok** has created two bands, 13-15 and 16-17 for many of its safety features, granting older teens greater scope to manage their experiences on the app. **Microsoft Edge**, a web browser, has launched *Kids Mode*, with two modes available, one for children aged 5-8 and another for 9-12s. These changes help users, and their parents or guardians, manage and curate their own experiences in an age appropriate way.

Empowerment tools and advertising: In February 2023, **Meta** introduced measures which prevents users aged 13-17 across the world from seeing advertising based on their activity. **Google** has announced plans to stop advertising to all under 18s in the EU.

A Note on Global Influence

In addition to the UK and the Republic of Ireland, where the Code is now law, other countries, including France, the Netherlands, and Sweden have already introduced guidance influenced by and building on the Age Appropriate Design Code. This year also saw the introduction of the EU's landmark Digital Services Act - which shares many of the principles of the Code and sets a new global standard for broader risk management, content moderation and transparency by tech companies.