

How Economic Drivers Undermine Child Safety Online

Social media companies make a lot of money from advertising to young users, but they do not have to reveal how it affects youth. The combination of astronomical profits and a lack of transparency means social media companies have little incentive to protect young people online or adopt meaningful self-regulation, highlighting the need for government regulation.

What type of study was conducted?

Our research team with the Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders (STRIPED) conducted a simulation study using rigorous, state-of-the-art mathematical methods to estimate annual ad revenue generated from users under the age of 18 years in the United States for six social media platforms: TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter (now X), and Snapchat. Data were sourced from Insider Intelligence’s eMarketer database, which contains estimates and historical data forecasts and analyses. We also used public survey data, including Pew Research, Common Sense Media, and Qustodio. Note that ad revenue per user by age group is based on the assumption that all users are targeted equally by ads.







Why was the study conducted?

Under current U.S. law, social media platforms have no legal obligation to release data on the types of content youth are exposed to, the impacts of content, the number of youth on the platform, nor how much revenue they generate.

What were the results?

See graphic for the total projected 2022 U.S. ad revenue from Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Twitter/X, and YouTube from U.S. users.

Have questions about our Roadmap or model legislation? **Contact us:**
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Platform	Projected 2022 U.S. Ad Revenue from U.S. Users Ages 0 to 12	Projected 2022 U.S. Ad Revenue from U.S. Users Ages 13 to 17
 YouTube	\$959 million	\$1.2 billion
 Instagram	\$802 million	\$4.0 billion
 Facebook	\$137 million	\$356 million
 TikTok	\$102 million	\$2.0 billion
 Twitter X	\$19 million	\$40 million
 Snapchat	\$123 million	\$1.0 billion

Why are these results important?

To our knowledge, this is the first study to offer estimates of the number of youth users on these platforms and how much social media platforms generate in ad revenue based on child users on the platforms. The massive revenue generated from young users discourages social media platforms from self-regulation and further demonstrates the need for greater transparency and legislative intervention to curb harms. [Our full study details can be accessed here.](#)

Raffoul A, Ward ZJ, Santoso M, Kavanaugh JR, Austin SB. Social media platforms generate billions of dollars in revenue from U.S. youth: Findings from a simulated revenue model. PLOS ONE. 2023;18(12): e0295337.