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NEW REPORT

What the Tech Giants Don’t Want You to Know

The report examines the retention mechanisms of tech giants, the behavior patterns of children and young people, and links to exposure to harmful content on TikTok, YouTube and, to some extent, Instagram.

100,000

datapoints are collected by TikTok on one single user yearly

INCREASED DATA HARVEST

Social media are not just social media. They are data factories. TikTok collects over **100,000** data points about each user every year. That's **17** times more than YouTube. For the most active users the difference is up to **50** times. The increased data harvest is particularly due to the ultra-short video format (shorts) first introduced by TikTok and later adopted by Meta, Snapchat and X, which allows for countless data registrations and detailed behavioral data.

895

videos are watched daily by the average user on TikTok

RETENTION MACHINES DRIVEN BY SHORTS

Tech giants design for retention with shorts being one of the design features with the biggest impact on prolonging consumption, heightening the volume of stimuli, and accelerates users' quest for content. The introduction of the format on YouTube has doubled the time spent on the platform. On TikTok, users watch an average of **895** videos per day, while the most active users watch up to **3,000** videos per day. At the same time, the extremely active users spend more than **40** days a year on TikTok alone.

18%

of videos shown to users on TikTok are ads

THE REVENUE OF RETENTION

The revenue generated from users' time spent on social media is a well-kept secret. In the report, TikTok's earnings from the young people included in the study are estimated based on the number of ads users are shown in their feed. Advertising accounts for **18 pct.** of the total number of TikTok videos included in the study. This gives TikTok an estimated revenue of **482-1020 DKK** per year per data donor.

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1.8 - 2%

of videos watched by users contain potentially harmful content

HARMFUL CONTENT IS PART OF YOUR FEED

The proportion of potentially harmful content that is explicitly violent amounts to **2.0 pct.** on TikTok and **1.8 pct.** on YouTube. For the most retained users, this corresponds to **15-20 videos per day** with a potentially negative impact. Such harmful content appears in the feed going from innocent dance videos to tragic school shootings, drug sales or other potentially harmful content in a split second.

Harmfulness is also evident in the massive exposure to content on topics such as beauty, fitness and lifestyle, which cumulatively can lead to negative effects on self-esteem and health, among other things.

2 of 3

platforms gave users access to data that was usable for study

INADEQUATE DATA

Users' access to the data that tech giants collect about them individually is a right secured by the GDPR, making it possible for users to donate that data to researchers. However, the study shows that there is a significant difference in the data access and data quality provided by TikTok, YouTube and Instagram. **Instagram delivers data to such a limited extent that they do not appear in the study**, and data from TikTok and YouTube does not contain the same level of comprehensiveness. As a result, **direct comparisons across platforms are challenging and hinder granular analysis of retention and harmful content.**

About the study

The 2025 annual report on the influence of tech giants on democracy, well-being, and social cohesion is produced by the Scandinavian analysis and research company 'Analyse & Tal'.

The report provides insights into the tech giants' machinery based on data donations from **219** Danes between the ages 15-45 and in total **17 million** data points from TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram. It provides in-depth insight into the specific group, but is not statistically representative of young people in Denmark.

The data allows for an examination of the systematicity of social media's retention of users through design, data, and algorithms, and how retention mechanisms contribute to exposure to harmful content. The data provides a detailed window into users' actual behavior on social media – every like, comment, dwell, and swipe. The same data platforms harvest and use to customize the user experience and maximize retention.

Read the full report here