

## Publication

# Social Media Terms and Conditions and Informed Consent From Children: Ethical Analysis

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Terms and conditions define the relationship between social media companies and users. However, these legal agreements are long and written in a complex language. It remains questionable whether users understand the terms and conditions and are aware of the consequences of joining such a network. With children from a young age interacting with social media, companies are acquiring large amounts of data, resulting in longitudinal data sets that most researchers can only dream of. The use of social media by children is highly relevant to their mental and physical health for 2 reasons: their health can be adversely affected by social media and their data can be used to conduct health research.; The aim of this paper is to offer an ethical analysis of how the most common social media apps and services inform users and obtain their consent regarding privacy and other issues and to discuss how lessons from research ethics can lead to trusted partnerships between users and social media companies. Our paper focuses on children, who represent a sensitive group among users of social media platforms.; A thematic analysis of the terms and conditions of the 20 most popular social media platforms and the 2 predominant mobile phone ecosystems (Android and iOS) was conducted. The results of this analysis served as the basis for scoring these platforms.; The analysis showed that most platforms comply with the age requirements issued by legislators. However, the consent process during sign-up was not taken seriously. Terms and conditions are often too long and difficult to understand, especially for younger users. The same applies to age verification, which is not realized proactively but instead relies on other users who report underaged users.; This study reveals that social media networks are still lacking in many respects regarding the adequate protection of children. Consent procedures are flawed because they are too complex, and in some cases, children can create social media accounts without sufficient age verification or parental oversight. Adopting measures based on key ethical principles will safeguard the health and well-being of children. This could mean standardizing the registration process in accordance with modern research ethics procedures: give users the key facts that they need in a format that can be read easily and quickly, rather than forcing them to wade through chapters of legal language that they cannot understand. Improving these processes would help safeguard the mental health of children and other social media users.

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