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THE TIKTOK CONTROVERSY

THE DEBATE CONTINUES

Privacy issues and disinformation exist across all social media platforms, not just TikTok. The data TikTok collects is similar to what other social media companies like Facebook and Instagram gather. They all sell user data to third parties. Cybersecurity experts argue that comprehensive legislation is needed to cover all companies and apps, preventing misuse and sale of U.S. consumer data.

TikTok faces legal challenges beyond security concerns. Former children's commissioner for England, Anne Longfield, is suing TikTok over how it collects and uses children's data. The claim is being filed on behalf of as many as 3.5 million children under the age of 13 who have used the popular video-sharing app since May 2018. If successful, affected children could be owed substantial compensation.

Some experts caution against a singular focus on banning TikTok. Banning TikTok alone won't necessarily make the U.S. safer. Instead, experts advocate for broader legislation that encompasses all apps and companies. China's ownership of TikTok also raises questions about other Chinese-owned apps. ByteDance, TikTok's parent company, also owns social media app Lemon8 and editing app Capcut. If the bill ultimately becomes law, TikTok may challenge it in court.

The TikTok controversy encompasses national security worries, privacy issues, and legal battles, making it an ongoing debate. At the time this newsletter was compiled, the U.S. Senate had not taken any action on the bill.

Solomon Adote
Chief Security Officer

THE TIKTOK CLOCK IS TICKING...

The U.S. House of Representatives recently passed a bill that would force a sale of TikTok's Chinese-owned parent company, ByteDance, or impose a U.S. ban if no sale occurs.

The bill essentially says that TikTok must be sold within six months to a buyer that satisfies the U.S. government. The sale would have to guarantee that ByteDance no longer has any control over TikTok or its algorithms that recommend content to users.

If ByteDance cannot or refuses to sell TikTok, it would be unlawful for app stores and web hosting companies to distribute or update the app in the United States. The Justice Department could punish any company that works with TikTok or offers its app for download.

The popular video-sharing app is at the center of controversy due to concerns about data privacy, censorship, and geopolitical implications. With over 100 million monthly active users in the U.S., there are fears that user data could fall into the possession of the Chinese government.

The Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act, passed by the House of Representatives, would force ByteDance to sell TikTok or ban the app from U.S. app stores. The motivation behind this bill is to prevent TikTok from being used for Chinese propaganda dissemination or data collection.

Lawmakers also worry that the app could be weaponized by China to spread misinformation. While TikTok claims that all its U.S. data is stored within U.S. servers and that it would never turn over user data to Chinese authorities, the hypothetical risk remains.

Critics argue that such a ban risks undermining America's commitment to free speech. The U.S. has long championed free speech and an open Internet, advocating against censorship and authoritarian control. If TikTok is banned, it could set a precedent for other countries to limit access to U.S.-based platforms.

Beyond data privacy, TikTok's powerful algorithm has raised concerns. While the app claims to "inspire creativity and bring joy," investigations have revealed that it exposes users to dangerous content. The algorithm controls which political movements and individuals gain attention, potentially influencing public discourse. This delicate balance between creativity and potential harm underscores the need for responsible algorithmic design and oversight.

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