**Tik Tok Continues Controversy**

In the last several years, TikTok, owned by ByteDance, has faced several allegations regarding the privacy of their online users. In 2019, there was a $5.7 million fine incurred to settle issues with the Federal Trade Commission over collecting information on children under the age of 13, and the problem has re-arisen in 2020. (Zhong & Frenkel, 2020)

As of July 2020, over a third of TikTok users were defined as 14 years of age or younger, which is approximately 49 million daily users. (Zhong & Frankel, 2020) With such a large number of users theoretically only spanning a two-year age range, it has been questioned how accurate the ages of Tik Tok users are. According to the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act, users under the age of 13 must acquire parental permission before any online service is allowed to obtain personal information on the user. TikTok responded in the past by utilizing age-analyzing facial recognition software to assess the age of users posting videos, which is a banned function for users under the age of 13. However, a former employee stated that although TikTok does use facial recognition software to assess the age of users, the app does not prevent users possibly under the age of 13 from posting videos or requiring permission from parents or guardians. (Zhong & Fenkel, 2020) After the $5.7 million fine in 2019, consumer groups were gathered to assess the effectiveness of TikTok’s child protection functions but found a huge hole – a user who tries to create an account with an age under 13 can easily stop and create a new account with an older age (Singer, 2020), implying the ease for children under 13 to create accounts. Because of this, TikTok may be collecting information on children under the age of 13, so the current question is - are they doing this knowingly or unknowingly?

In February of this year, TikTok has once again been accused of using artificial intelligence to acquire personal information on users. (BBC News, 2021) TikTok stated after the settlement, “While we disagree with the assertions, rather than go through lengthy litigation, we’d like to focus our efforts on building a safe and joyful experience for the TikTok community.” (BBC News, 2021) However, Ray Walsh, an expert in the field of digital-privacy, stated that with such a large payout, it is likely that ByteDance feels safer cutting its losses than facing serious legal action and bad press. (BBC News, 2021) After the young user privacy violations of the past and these new accusations over the use of artificial intelligence, users must seriously consider how they value their online privacy before creating an account with TikTok.

References

B. (2021, February 26). TikTok agrees legal payout Over facial recognition. Retrieved April 21, 2021, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-56210052>

Singer, N. (2020, May 14). TikTok broke Privacy Promises, CHILDREN'S groups say. Retrieved April 21, 2021, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/14/technology/tiktok-kids-privacy.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article>

Zhong, R., & Frenkel, S. (2020, August 14). A third of TikTok's U.S. users may be 14 or under, raising safety questions. Retrieved April 21, 2021, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/14/technology/tiktok-underage-users-ftc.html?auth=linked-google>