

Kid-centric mobile gaming companies reach settlement to stop tracking children under 13

Article

The news: Disney, ViacomCBS, and several ad tech companies have reached a **settlement** in a series of lawsuits alleging that the companies collected personal data from children under 13

and used it to target ads to them, without the knowledge or consent of parents. The defendants have agreed to remove or disable the software they used to track users from “tens of thousands” of apps, **per** MediaPost.

More on this: The suit specifically focused on developers of children’s mobile gaming apps, like the very popular “Subway Surfers” from Kiloo and Disney’s “Princess Palace Pets.” Kids’ gaming apps have been **under fire** for **years** for manipulative or deceptive advertising intended to push children to make in-app purchases. And with kids’ mobile screen time **rising** sharply during the pandemic, there’s been even more cause for concern. Gaming in particular has been the No. 2 most popular mobile activity of US kids ages 8 and younger for four years, well before the suit was filed—in 2017, 70% of parents reported their child played mobile games, per a **study** by Common Sense Media.

What this means: Mobile gaming tends to be more resilient to privacy changes, such as Apple’s upcoming AppTrackingTransparency **update**, since games are typically owned by a few large publishers that can use first-party data to track and target ads. But this settlement effectively rids the involved mobile game developers of that advantage by barring them from using cross-app tracking.

While this settlement applies only to the companies named in the suit, it’s likely that more privacy changes will follow, forcing publishers of children’s mobile gaming apps to rely more heavily on contextual targeting.