

Consumer groups claim YouTube kids app 'deceptive'

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US child advocacy groups want YouTube's new children's app investigated

A coalition of consumer and child advocacy groups asked US regulators Tuesday to investigate Google's new YouTube app for children, claiming it inappropriately delivers too much advertising to young viewers.

The videos on YouTube Kids "intermix commercial and other content in ways that are deceptive and unfair to children and would not be

permitted to be shown on broadcast or cable television," said a letter to the Federal Trade Commission from nine organizations.

The mobile app which was announced in February by Google includes segments endorsing toys, candy and other products that appear to be from "undisclosed relationships" with the makers of the items, in violation of standards for truth in advertising, the letter said.

The letter added these types of product endorsements mixed with entertainment would not be allowed on broadcast television and are especially unfair because children often lack the ability to distinguish between entertainment and advertising.

"This blending of children's programming content with advertising material on television has long been prohibited because it is unfair and deceptive to children," the letter said.

"The fact that children are viewing the videos on a tablet or smartphone screen instead of on a television screen does not make it any less unfair and deceptive."



YouTube new childrens' app is proving controversial

The application is designed as a simple-to-use stage for age-appropriate videos, channels and playlists skewed toward content that promotes literacy, according to YouTube.

It also boasts parental controls including a countdown clock to limit viewing time and the ability to disable online searches.

YouTube Kids launch partners included Jim Henson TV, DreamWorks TV, Mother Goose Club, National Geographic, Reading Rainbow, and Talking Tom and Friends.

But the organizations in the complaint said the app is built around commercial products.

"There is nothing 'child friendly' about an app that obliterates long-standing principles designed to protect kids from commercialism," said Josh Golin of the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood.

"YouTube Kids exploits children's developmental vulnerabilities by delivering a steady stream of advertising that masquerades as programming," he added.

"YouTube Kids' advertising policy is incredibly deceptive. To cite just one example, Google claims it doesn't accept food and beverage ads but McDonald's actually has its own channel and the 'content' includes actual Happy Meal commercials."

The letter was also endorsed by the Center for Digital Democracy, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Center for Science in the Public Interest, Children Now, Consumer Federation of America, Consumer Watchdog and Public Citizen.

YouTube said the concerns were misplaced.

"We worked with numerous partners and child advocacy groups when developing YouTube Kids," said a statement from the online video giant.

"While we are always open to feedback on ways to improve the app, we were not contacted directly by the signers of this letter and strongly disagree with their contentions, including the suggestion that no free, ad-supported experience for kids will ever be acceptable. We disagree and think that great content shouldn't be reserved for only those families who can afford it."

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