

CYSE 201S

Case Study: Cybersecurity and Social Sciences

Student Name: Fallon Sullivan

School of Cybersecurity, Old Dominion University

CYSE 201S: Cybersecurity and the Social Sciences

Instructor Name: **Diwakar Yalpi**

Date: 21APR26

INTRODUCTION

To first recount the incident in question, I must explain what Discord is. Discord is an application owned by a private company that was founded in 2015. The application itself enables groups of individuals to come together on a common platform to socialize virtually through voice, text, and video communications. It is not a social media platform, it's closer to Skype, and is considered the unprofessional alternative to it. The program is free to use, free to make an account, start a server, and begin adding your friends. There are paid options available: subscriptions which allow access to more advanced features, profile customization options, and larger file sizes for uploading to share videos or files with your friends.

As with any online space where individuals from various regions, age groups, and philosophies interact, there is a concern for child safety and content filtering. On February 9th of this year, Discord's safety team made a blog post titled, "How Discord is Building Safer Experiences for Teens"⁽¹⁾ where it was announced that Discord planned to roll out a new age verification system which would require facial scans or ID requirements through a third party vendor to ensure that only adults are receiving access to adult content. The blowback from this announcement was mostly focused around the community's concerns for data privacy and their personally identifiable information because there was a recent data breach Discord

itself had suffered in October of 2025⁽²⁾ where hackers gained access to IDs and information that had been provided to their customer support service.

In response to the public outcry, Discord announced two weeks later, on February 24th, that they are going to push back the global rollout of their new age verification system⁽³⁾. Along with this announcement, came many public statements and platitudes aimed at assuaging the concerned user base that their private information was not at risk, as the identity-specific information never gets forward to Discord itself, only the age estimation from the third party vendor.

Analysis

As we have explored in this course, the concept of Mazlow's Hierarchy of needs being applied to internet usage plays a role in the reaction from the user base during this incident. Privacy is highly valued in internet spaces, and when that privacy is threatened, the backlash is usually immediate and volatile. When individuals give their information to websites, or applications, there is an agreement that the data will not be misused, or misplaced. There is a level of trust between the individual and the corporation responsible for handling that data. Discord had lost some of that trust in October, and then less than a year later announced a system that would collect more information from their users.

Solutions

A simple solution would be that the data required to verify a user's age is destroyed once the verification is complete. There should be no reason why either Discord or its verification system needs to hold onto that information once the process is finished. They're not a government agency, they aren't responsible for maintaining such records - simply that they have complied with laws and did their due diligence. If any questions of veracity came up regarding the process, then the methods used could be explored through inquiry and it can be determined whether the system is deemed good enough without compromising any personal information.

Reflections

While the need for age verification to ensure safe spaces for underage users is an obvious positive requirement, the methods suggested to carry out this verification necessitate an increased level of scrutiny. It seems here that Discord was simply checking boxes for compliance, without considering the psychological aspect - that individuals value their privacy. Had Discord approached the situation with clearer consideration for the needs and concerns of users while explaining more clearly how the risk of breach of data was being reduced, the initial blowback would have been minimized. An explanation of increased security measures going forward would have met psychological needs, while explaining which technology was being used and how it was secure would have offered a technical security to the situation.

Conclusion

Since the announcement to postpone the global rollout of their mandatory age verification there has been no further update on the situation. Some of the statements made by Discord were aimed to reduce the impact of the announcement by making statements on forums such as Reddit, and reaching out to further clarify what measures are being taken to ensure the privacy of its users. There is always a constant battle around these types of age verification systems, and what measures can be taken to produce verifiable results while also minimizing risk to the users. The balancing act between the psychological needs of the individuals, and the societal, oftentimes legal, requirement for age verification to restrict content appropriately is difficult to maintain. We will have to wait and see what happens in the later half of 2026 to reach a conclusion to this issue.

REFERENCES

- (1) Discord Safety, How Discord is Building Safer Experiences for Teens, [Discord.com](https://discord.com/safety/how-discord-is-building-safer-experiences-for-teens), 9 February, 2026, (Accessed 21APR2026)
<https://discord.com/safety/how-discord-is-building-safer-experiences-for-teens>

(2) Discord Inc., Update on a Security Incident Involving Third-Party Customer Service, [Discord.com](https://discord.com), 3 October, 2025, (Accessed 21APR26)

<https://discord.com/press-releases/update-on-security-incident-involving-third-party-customer-service>

(3) Burke, Minyvonne, Discord Pushes Back Age Verification Rollout Following Backlash, *nbcnews*, February 25th, 2026 (Accessed 21APR26)

<https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/discord-pushes-back-age-verification-rollout-backlash-rcna260604>

(4) Sarah Backman, Tim Stevens, Cyber risk logics and their implications for cybersecurity, *International Affairs*, Volume 100, Issue 6, November 2024, Pages 2441–2460, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iaae236>