

A woman is shown from the chest up, wearing a black VR headset and large black headphones. She is holding two VR controllers, one in each hand. Her mouth is open in a grimace, showing her teeth, suggesting she is experiencing discomfort or frustration. The background is dark with blue lighting, possibly from a screen or stage lights. The overall mood is one of negative experience with VR technology.

**Metaverse:  
another cesspool  
of toxic content**

# Introduction

In late 2021, Meta, formerly known as Facebook, announced plans to pivot to the metaverse – a fully digital environment accessed through virtual reality technologies such as VR headsets. Faced with a growing list of existential threats – from a drastic \$200 billion drop in value in a single day, to a chronic growth crisis, Mark Zuckerberg is pinning the company’s future on his metaverse project.

But as more information and research comes to light about Meta’s VR platform, Horizon Worlds, it’s becoming increasingly apparent that Zuckerberg’s strategy could exacerbate the online harms and human rights abuses that the company is failing to address on its existing platforms - which is not only harming communities but damaging the company.

Despite venturing into uncharted territory, the company has invested \$10 billion in the metaverse, and is deploying a ruthless acquisition strategy to stamp out competition and stifle innovation. This isn’t going unnoticed by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) which launched an investigation in 2021 into Meta’s anticompetitive practices in building the metaverse – with one commissioner calling it a “Pac-Man strategy”<sup>1</sup>.

This briefing offers an overview of Meta’s VR platforms, Horizon Worlds and Horizon Venues, and documents the many harms found on the platforms both from previously conducted research, as well as new research conducted in May 2022 by SumOfUs.

Some key takeaways from the research include:

- Virtual groping and gang-rape
- Sexual, homophobic and racist comments
- Inadequate processes for reporting violations
- Failure to take action against users who violate platforms guidelines
- Ease for children to use the platform and encounter harms

Given the failure of Meta to moderate content on its other platforms, it is unsurprising that it is already seriously lagging behind with content moderation on its metaverse platforms. With just 300,000 users, it is remarkable how quickly Horizon Worlds has become a breeding ground for harmful content.

Without urgent action, this will only get worse. Until regulators hold Meta to account for the harms found on its platforms, weaken its grip over technology industries and rein in its ruthless data harvesting practices, the metaverse is very likely to spiral into a darker, more toxic environment.

<sup>1</sup> Diane Bartz, *Reuters 'Pac-Man strategy': Big Tech's many small mergers draw more U.S. antitrust scrutiny* <https://financialpost.com/technology/big-techs-little-mergers-draw-more-u-s-antitrust-scrutiny>

## Pre-Metaverse: Facebook in crisis

To understand why Mark Zuckerberg is betting the house on the Metaverse, it's helpful to review the state of the company pre-2022.

Since the Cambridge Analytica scandal, Meta has struggled to establish trust with the public and advertisers alike. Immediately after the scandal, advertisers boycotted the platform and regulators launched investigations, including one which led to a \$5 billion fine by the FTC. In Europe, multi-million dollar lawsuits were filed against the company after it was found to be in breach of GDPR.

But beyond the regulatory concerns around the platform's inability to safely and transparently handle user data, the company has become synonymous with "toxic". From contributing to genocide, hate crimes, fascism, public health crises, and harms to children – the platform is drowning in dangerous content. As a result, the platform experienced a second significant advertisers' boycott in 2020 – with major brands including Unilever, Nike, and Coca Cola suspending ads.

Though Zuckerberg has been dismissive of advertiser boycotts and contemptuous of lawmakers' threats to regulate Big Tech, there is an existential concern he cannot so easily ignore: the platform's inability to grow. In the fourth quarter of 2021, Meta's Facebook platform lost half a million daily users, according to company data – the first ever such decline. While small in comparison to Facebook's 1.93 billion daily

active users, the fall is a significant marker given the company's history of rapid growth.

It also helps to explain the company's all-in dive into the Metaverse. At the heart of the growth crisis is the fact that young people are not flocking to Meta's products in the way they are to competitor platforms like TikTok, which has grown to 1 billion active users. In a bid to stay relevant to young people, Meta has invested heavily in its "Reels" function – a clone of TikTok – and in a push to become the market leader in virtual reality, has adopted a shark-like approach to acquiring VR technology.

## Building the Metaverse – a big shark in a small tank

According to a 2021 Goldman Sachs analysis, the main competitors in the metaverse include Epic Games, Roblox, Niantic Labs, Nvidia, and Meta.<sup>2</sup> Though the gaming industry has had a head start in this space, other Big Tech companies such as Sony, Microsoft, Google, and Apple are investing resources in the metaverse. Similarly, other companies like Nike and Disney are showing early efforts to capitalize on the ability to sell products in a metaverse marketplace.<sup>3</sup> Some experts predict that companies who can lead in this industry now may become the frontrunners of Big Tech in the future.<sup>4</sup>

In late 2021, Meta announced its new plans to pivot to the Metaverse, investing around \$10 billion in the project called Facebook Reality Labs<sup>5</sup> and creating 10,000 metaverse-related jobs in Europe.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> A. Steiger, A. Vegliante, E. Sheridan, K. Campagna, L. Czura, and M. Ng, *Framing the Future of Web 3.0: Metaverse Edition*, Goldman Sachs, 2021, <https://www.goldmansachs.com/insights/pages/gs-research/framing-the-future-of-web-3.0-metaverse-edition/report.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> M. Quiroz-Gutierrez. *Companies like Nike and Disney are hiring like crazy for the metaverse—and it's just the start*. Fortune. 2022. <https://fortune.com/2022/02/02/nike-disney-meta-companies-hiring-spree-metaverse/>.

<sup>4</sup> S. Ghaffary and S. Morrison. *Can FB monopolize the metaverse?* Vox: Recode. 2022. <https://www.vox.com/recode/22933851/meta-facebook-metaverse-antitrust-regulation>.

<sup>5</sup> R. Metz. *Harassment is a problem in VR, and it's likely to get worse*. CNN News. 2022. [https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/05/tech/virtual-reality-harassment/index.html?utm\\_source=optzlynewmarketribbon](https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/05/tech/virtual-reality-harassment/index.html?utm_source=optzlynewmarketribbon).

<sup>6</sup> N. Clegg and J. Olivan. *Investing in European Talent to Help Build the Metaverse*. Meta. 2021. <https://about.fb.com/news/2021/10/creating-jobs-europe-metaverse/>.

However, the company had already been investing in the VR industry for some time. In 2014, Meta acquired Oculus, a VR headset developer, a step that enabled it to become a major industry competitor. By the end of 2021, Oculus was the most popular VR head mounted display in the market, with an estimated 8 million application downloads using the headset.<sup>7</sup>

In 2019, Meta also bought Beat Games, the makers of Beat Saber, the most popular game on the Oculus at the time of the acquisition. The following year, it acquired Sanzaru Games and Ready at Dawn. And in 2021, Meta bought both Unit 2 Games, the maker of a fast-growing platform that allows users to make and share games, and BigBox VR, makers of the very popular first-person shooter game Population: One.

Meta now owns at least half of the top six most profitable VR games on its own Oculus platform.

None of these acquisitions drew much attention. It wasn't until Meta decided to buy Within, the developer that makes a popular workout and meditation game called Supernatural, for \$400 million,<sup>8</sup> that the FTC finally took notice, reportedly launching a probe into Meta's VR division for anticompetitive acquisitions and predatory pricing – namely, pricing headsets at several hundred dollars below market value in order to squash competition. Meta is also racing to file hundreds of patents related to VR technology – from cameras and

software systems for improved tracking of users' facial expressions<sup>9</sup>, to wearable magnetic sensor systems to detect torso/chest movements<sup>10</sup>, to avatar personalisation machines that aim to simulate users' appearance for their avatars<sup>11</sup>.

## Metaverse's business model: surveillance capitalism on crack

Meta's extractive business model – the collection, storage, and harvesting of user data for profit – will remain a major source of revenue.

But in a virtual world, where users wear VR headsets that can track bodily information like eye movements, facial expressions, and body temperature, we can expect a more dystopian version of surveillance capitalism.

One of Meta's patents would improve the company's capability to auction user data to outside advertisers,<sup>12</sup> enabling them to “intervene” in individual experiences through targeted advertisements and product placements.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, this data can strengthen consumer profiles with utmost precision<sup>14</sup> by providing new insight into a user's behavior and mannerisms in ways traditional social media platforms cannot. For instance, the VR hardware can track the user's eye movements, and identify whether a user takes interest in a specific product – measuring the length of time a user looks at an item, and pupil dilation in

<sup>7</sup> Y. Bokkini. *Inside the metaverse, are you safe?* Dispatches. 2022. <https://www.channel4.com/programmes/inside-the-metaverse-are-you-safe-dispatches>.

<sup>8</sup> A. Heath. *FTC opens antitrust probe into Meta's purchase of VR fitness app Supernatural.* The Verge. 2021. <https://www.theverge.com/2021/12/16/22840635/ftc-opens-antitrust-probe-meta-deal-vr-fitness-app-supernatural>.

<sup>9</sup> FB Patent. USPTO. 2019. <https://bit.ly/3sRuSqV>.

<sup>10</sup> FB Patent. USPTO. 2017. <https://bit.ly/38KKUfd>.

<sup>11</sup> FB Patent. USPTO. 2020. <https://bit.ly/38L3TGz>.

<sup>12</sup> H. Murphy. *Facebook patents reveal how it intends to cash in on metaverse.* Financial Times. 2022. <https://on.ft.com/3OZgNB0>.

<sup>13</sup> E. Carmi. *Facebook Patent Shows How You May Be Exploited in the Metaverse.* Tech Policy Press. 2021. <https://techpolicy.press/facebook-patent-shows-how-you-may-be-exploited-in-the-metaverse/>.

<sup>14</sup> B. Heller, *Reimagining Reality: Human Rights and Immersive Technology*, Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, Harvard Kennedy School, 2020, [https://carrcenter.hks.harvard.edu/files/cchr/files/ccdp\\_2020-008\\_brittanheller.pdf](https://carrcenter.hks.harvard.edu/files/cchr/files/ccdp_2020-008_brittanheller.pdf).

response to ads they see.<sup>15</sup> As a result, these devices unveil sensitive information that may give accurate insight into a user's likes, dislikes, feelings, age, and even health conditions that can be traced through eye movements.<sup>16</sup>

## Diving into the Metaverse: just another cesspool?

Meta has two main VR applications. One is Horizon Worlds – a social-networking app that enables users to create and interact in unique digital rooms, known as “worlds.” As of February 2022, around “10,000 separate worlds” were built in Horizon Worlds, having an estimated user base of 300,000+ people and counting.<sup>17</sup>

The second is Horizon Venues – a separate app dedicated to hosting live-streaming events in the metaverse.

In addition to these two applications, Meta also acquired other gaming apps, such as Population One and Echo VR which will also be referenced in later sections.

Other mega-popular metaverse apps not owned by Meta can still be accessed through its Oculus VR headset – including Rec Room, VRChat, and AltspaceVR. Across these metaverse applications, deeply disturbing patterns are emerging.

## Harassment and abuse is rampant

Despite Meta's promises to improve safety measures<sup>18</sup> and implement community guidelines<sup>19</sup> in its metaverse, researchers and users have reported instances of sexual violence, proliferation of graphic content, and hate speech in both Meta's apps and competitors' apps accessed through the Oculus headset.

## Sexual violence and sexual harassment

### (TRIGGER WARNING)

Minimal moderation allows toxic behavior to thrive, normalizing sexual harassment especially towards female-appearing and female-sounding avatars. In May 2022, SumOfUs researchers went into the Metaverse and were astonished by how quickly they encountered sexual harassment. The disturbing accounts below offer a deeper glimpse into the harmful sexual content on a largely unregulated Metaverse.

- **Horizon Worlds:** About an hour into using the platform, a SumOfUs researcher was led into a private room at a party where she was raped by a user who kept telling her to turn around so he could do it from behind while users outside the window could see – all while another user in the room watched and passed around a vodka bottle. This sexual act was non-consensual, and the researcher described the experience as “disorienting” and confusing. Click [here](#) to view a clip.

<sup>15</sup> B. Heller, *Reimagining Reality: Human Rights and Immersive Technology*, Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, Harvard Kennedy School, 2020, [https://carrcenter.hks.harvard.edu/files/cchr/files/ccdp\\_2020-008\\_brittanheller.pdf](https://carrcenter.hks.harvard.edu/files/cchr/files/ccdp_2020-008_brittanheller.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> L. Sarah, *Why Facebook, Snapchat, and Google want smart glasses to be a thing*, Mozilla Foundation, 2021, <https://foundation.mozilla.org/en/blog/why-facebook-snapchat-and-google-want-smart-glasses-to-be-a-thing/>.

<sup>17</sup> A. Heath. Meta's social VR platform Horizon hits 300,000 users. The Verge. 2022. <https://www.theverge.com/2022/2/17/22939297/meta-social-vr-platform-horizon-300000-users>.

<sup>18</sup> Meta. *Notice of Monitoring and Recording to Improve Safety in Horizon Worlds*. 2022. [https://store.facebook.com/legal/quest/monitoring-recording-safety-horizon/?utm\\_source=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F&utm\\_medium=organicsearch](https://store.facebook.com/legal/quest/monitoring-recording-safety-horizon/?utm_source=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F&utm_medium=organicsearch).

<sup>19</sup> Meta. *Conduct in VR Policy*. 2022. <https://store.facebook.com/help/quest/articles/accounts/privacy-information-and-settings/con-5>

- **Horizon Worlds (Beta Testing):** An anonymous beta tester for Horizon Worlds filed a complaint stating that her “avatar had been groped by a stranger” and suggesting better mechanisms for preventing and reporting harassment. However, after receiving the complaint, Meta not only failed to take action against the aggressor, but actually blamed the beta tester for inadequate use of personal safety features.<sup>20</sup>
- **Horizon Worlds:** Nina Jane Patel reported being “virtually gang raped”<sup>21</sup> within 60 seconds of logging on the platform by a group of 3-4 male-appearing avatars. Patel was “groped aggressively”<sup>22</sup> and “verbally and sexually harassed,” becoming a target for suggestive and lewd remarks due to her avatar’s outwardly female appearance.
- **Population One (Meta-owned):** Chanelle Siggins was approached by another player, who then “simulated groping and ejaculating onto her avatar.” Another player named Mari DeGrazia reported witnessing harassment more than three times per week. DeGrazia also experienced abuse while wearing a haptic vest, when “another player groped her avatar’s chest.”<sup>23</sup>
- **Echo VR (Meta-owned):** Sydney Smith encountered “lewd, sexist remarks” while playing Echo VR as another player claimed to have “recorded her [voice]” in order to “jerk off.” After the incident, Smith described having difficulty reporting the player in the game.<sup>24</sup>

The SumOfUs researcher noted how quickly she encountered sexual assault on the platform after another user encouraged her to disable the personal boundaries setting. She noted that when another user touches you, the hand controllers vibrate, creating a very disorienting and even disturbing physical experience during a virtual assault.

Regarding the experience of being sexually assaulted in VR, the researcher said: “It happened so fast I kind of disassociated. One part of my brain was like wtf is happening, the other part was like this isn’t a real body, and another part was like, this is important research.”

These troubling events are not isolated to Meta-owned apps. VR users have long reported problems with sexual harassment, verbal abuse, racial slurs, and invasion of personal space on a myriad of apps (not owned by Meta) such as Rec Room, VRChat, and AltspaceVR.<sup>25</sup> Many of these apps remain accessible via Meta’s Oculus Quest.

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[duct-in-vr-policy/](#).

<sup>20</sup> W. Duffield. *A Grope in Meta’s Space*. Tech Dirt. 2021. <https://www.techdirt.com/2021/12/28/grope-metas-space/>.

<sup>21</sup> N. Patel. *Reality of Fiction?* Medium. 2021. <https://medium.com/kabuni/fiction-vs-non-fiction-98aa0098f3b0>

<sup>22</sup> M. Clayton. *Mother says she was virtually groped by three male characters within seconds of entering Facebook’s online world Metaverse*. Daily Mail. 2022. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10455417/Mother-43-avatar-groped-three-male-characters-online-Metaverse.html>

<sup>23</sup> S. Frenkel and K. Browning. *The Metaverse’s Dark Side: Here Come Harassment and Assaults*. New York Times. 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/30/technology/metaverse-harassment-assaults.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Q. Wong. *As Facebook Plans the Metaverse, It Struggles to Combat Harassment in VR*. CNET. 2021. <https://www.cnet.com/tech/gaming/features/as-facebook-plans-the-metaverse-it-struggles-to-combat-harassment-in-vr/>.

<sup>25</sup> L. Blackwell, N. Ellison, N. Elliot-Deflo, R. Schwartz, *Harassment in Social Virtual Reality: Challenges for Platform Governance*, PACM on Human-Computer Interaction Vol. 3, No. CSCW, Article 100, 2019, <http://www.lindsayblackwell.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Harassment-in-Social-Virtual-Reality-CSCW-2019.pdf>.

## Conspiracy theories, hate speech, and graphic content

### (TRIGGER WARNING)

Users have reported seeing graphic content and observing hate speech that is discriminatory, homophobic, racist, and sexual in nature. This behavior harms people of color, members of the LGBTQ+ community, women, and children, making these spaces dangerous and inaccessible. Researchers also noted the propensity of the metaverse to harbor extremist content. Below are some accounts:

- **Horizon Worlds:** Within a few minutes of logging into the platform, SumOfUs researchers experienced [homophobic slurs](#), [gun violence](#) (including a shoot out at a house party), [drugs](#) laid out on a table, and a user stalking the researcher and following her into different worlds.
- **Horizon Worlds:** To better understand Horizon Worlds' moderation, BuzzFeed reporters "built a private Horizon World" called the "Qniverse." Here, reporters filled the room with right-wing slogans claiming U.S. election fraud and pandemic misinformation. However, after attempting to report the room for violating VR policy, safety specialists identified that the room did not break any guidelines. Only after reaching out to Meta did the company remove the content. In the BuzzFeed article, Callum Hood from the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) was quoted saying that unmoderated Horizon Worlds private rooms, like Facebook private rooms, may harbor "harmful content" with no oversight.<sup>26</sup>

- **Echo VR (Meta-owned):** Theo Young, a 17 year old VR user, mentioned in an interview that "toxic behavior" has become more frequent in Echo VR, as he witnessed "homophobic language" and the sexual harassment of another female player. In the same interview, Jason Lemon, a Black man, testifies that racial harassment in EchoVR has the same effect as racial harassment in real life.<sup>27</sup>
- **Rec Room & VRChat (Separate Apps):** Journalist Yinka Bokinni entered Rec Room and VRChat to investigate the enforcement of community guidelines. Within seconds of entering these rooms, Bokinni observed avatars making intense racist, sexist, and homophobic comments and witnessed other avatars "simulating sex." She also experienced sexual harassment, verbal abuse, and repeated invasion of personal space despite using safety features. Bokinni also noted that many underage kids were using the app in spite of the apps' age restrictions.<sup>28</sup>

## Content moderation: Meta's game of whack-a-mole

We've seen how Meta deals with content moderation and the struggles it faces around this critical issue. One thing is for certain: the explosive growth Meta experienced over the years, without any real safeguards in place, means that it never invested in a foundational approach to content moderation. It wasn't until Russian disinformation threatened to destroy the fabric of our societies during the 2016 US election that alarm bells went off, and they haven't stopped ringing.

Instead of learning from its previous mistakes, Meta is pushing ahead with the Metaverse with no clear plan

<sup>26</sup> E. Baker-White. *Meta wouldn't tell us how it enforces its rules in VR, so we ran a test to find out.* BuzzFeed. 2022. <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/emilybakerwhite/meta-facebook-horizon-vr-content-rules-test>.

<sup>27</sup> Q. Wong. *As Facebook Plans the Metaverse, It Struggles to Combat Harassment in VR.* CNET. 2021. <https://www.cnet.com/tech/gaming/features/as-facebook-plans-the-metaverse-it-struggles-to-combat-harassment-in-vr/>.

<sup>28</sup> Y. Bokinni. *Inside the metaverse, are you safe?* Dispatches. 2022. <https://www.channel4.com/programmes/inside-the-metaverse-are-you-safe-dispatches>.

for how it will curb harmful content and behavior, disinformation and hate speech. Andrew Bosworth, Meta's Chief Tech Officer, admitted in an internal memo that moderation in the metaverse "at any meaningful scale is practically impossible."<sup>29</sup>

And in a recent blog post, Meta's policy chief Nick Clegg said Meta is viewing interactions in the Metaverse to be more "ephemeral", and that decisions around moderating content will be more akin to whether or not to intervene in a heated back and forth in a bar, rather than like the active policing of harmful content on Facebook.<sup>30</sup>

Though Meta has community guidelines for its VR apps, two main issues emerge when enforcing them.

First is the lack of content moderators. Meta has assured the public that trained safety specialists and moderators are able to enforce guidelines to protect users. However, user interviews indicate an insufficient number of moderators in-game to regulate community behavior. A Tech Crunch report from March 2022 states that human moderators are only available in the main plaza of Horizon Worlds and seemingly giving information on how to take a selfie, not meaningfully moderating user behavior in different parts of the platform.<sup>31</sup>

Second is the number of children on the VR platforms. Although Meta's rules state that users must be 18+ years old to access Horizon Worlds and Horizon Venues, existing users complain that the apps are full of underage children. It is as simple as

either using a parent or older sibling's account, or even creating a fake 18+ account on Facebook in a matter of minutes.

Research from the Center for Countering Digital Hate found that users, including minors, are exposed to abusive behavior every 7 minutes in VRChat. This includes bullying, harassment, racism, extremism, exposure to pornographic content and grooming. Experts have expressed concern that the apps' failures to enforce community guidelines and respond to complaints will allow sexual predators<sup>32</sup> and pedophiles to target children.<sup>33</sup>

In response to complaints of harassment and abuse, metaverse apps like Horizon Worlds have implemented new safety features such as a personal safety bubble<sup>34</sup> in addition to existing tools that allow people to block, mute, or report other players, and low-level parental controls to try to prevent younger users accessing specific apps. While these design features are necessary, they can be easily side-stepped – including by children. The SumOfUs researcher was encouraged and instructed by another user to remove her personal boundaries setting, and that quickly spiraled into sexual harassment. And many other users experiencing harassment and abuse state that these functions fall short of holding other users accountable for misbehavior, as the platform puts the responsibility of moderating content on the player being harassed.

<sup>29</sup> Q. Wong. *As Facebook Plans the Metaverse, It Struggles to Combat Harassment in VR*. CNET. 2021. <https://www.cnet.com/tech/gaming/features/as-facebook-plans-the-metaverse-it-struggles-to-combat-harassment-in-vr/>.

<sup>30</sup> N. Clegg, *Making the Metaverse: what it is, how it will be built, and why it matters*: <https://nickclegg.medium.com/making-the-metaverse-what-it-is-how-it-will-be-built-and-why-it-matters-3710f7570b04>

<sup>31</sup> A Silberling, *Meta will add basic supervision parental controls to its VR headset almost three years after launch*: <https://techcrunch.com/2022/03/16/meta-quest-parental-controls-virtual-reality/>

<sup>32</sup> W. Oremus. *Kids are flocking to Facebook's 'metaverse.' Experts worry predators will follow*. The Washington Post. 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/02/07/facebook-metaverse-horizon-worlds-kids-safety/>

<sup>33</sup> Y. Bokinni. *Racism and rape jokes: my nightmare trip to the metaverse*. The Guardian. 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2022/apr/25/a-barrage-of-assault-racism-and-jokes-my-nightmare-trip-into-the-metaverse>.

<sup>34</sup> R. Metz. *Harassment is a problem in VR, and it's likely to get worse*. CNN. 2022. [https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/05/tech/virtual-reality-harassment/index.html?utm\\_source=optzynewmarketribbon](https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/05/tech/virtual-reality-harassment/index.html?utm_source=optzynewmarketribbon).



Several users also argue that reporting individual incidents of harassment can oftentimes be unclear and lack transparent follow-up.<sup>35</sup> In addition, Meta only put in place parental controls when the UK regulator warned the company that it could be in breach of the UK Age Appropriate Design Code.

## How to stop Metaverse from spiraling into a dark abyss

Meta has repeatedly demonstrated that it is unable to adequately monitor and respond to harmful content on Facebook, Instagram and Whatsapp – so it is no surprise that it is already failing on the Metaverse too.

But beyond content moderation, there are three key measures that should be taken to prevent the Metaverse from spiraling into another dark abyss.

First, regulators must address the predatory, anticompetitive practices of Mark Zuckerberg. Meta must not be allowed to buy out major software, hardware, and even streamers in the VR world without thorough scrutiny from regulators. If Meta is allowed to continue its aggressive acquisition strategy, it risks making it very difficult for other, newer companies to enter or operate in the industry. The FTC must be steadfast in its investigation of Meta's Metaverse acquisition strategy, and hold the company accountable for its anticompetitive practices. Similarly, the FTC and Congress must create more friction and investigate acquisitions before they take place – especially if the company has already been under investigation for other acquisitions, as Meta has. It shouldn't have taken the \$400 million acquisition of Within for the FTC to act – the commission should be on Meta's case when it acquires even smaller technologies.

Second, it is alarming that, to this day, the US has no adequate data protection laws to safeguard consumers against abusive data harvesting practices across platforms, allowing companies like Meta to sell data to 3rd parties with little oversight. The US's non-existent data protection laws mean the onus is on users to protect themselves against these exploitative practices. As VR becomes more popular, tech companies' data harvesting practices could have larger and more serious consequences – as the collection of sensitive biometric data becomes the norm, for example. The US must pass strong federal privacy laws that protect users' personal data, similar to those passed in the EU and some other countries.


Third, as the Digital Services Act (DSA) gets written into law in Europe, other governments around the world must use this landmark legislation as a blueprint for how to regulate Big Tech companies in their own jurisdictions. Once the DSA kicks in, Meta will be forced to make serious changes, such as constraining its use of data to target ads (it will be obliged to stop targeting ads to minors, for example) and providing more transparency about how its algorithms are designed and operate, which will likely play a role in what is shown to users in the Metaverse. The DSA and even the DMA (Digital Markets Act) will have significant consequences for the Metaverse, and it's crucial that other governments pass similar legislation too.

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<sup>35</sup> Y. Bokkini. *Inside the metaverse, are you safe?* Dispatches. 2022. <https://www.channel4.com/programmes/inside-the-metaverse-are-you-safe-dispatches>.

# Appendix

## HORIZON WORLDS USER REVIEWS


 **little\_phish** Dec 25 at 8:58 AM


★ ★ ★ ★ ★

**Mods won't do their jobs!**

The biggest problem with horizon world's are the moderators! It's supposed to be an 18 plus game but it's like 80% children in there and the mods don't care. I was just on and there was a kid clearly a child on there and I brought up to the moderator, "dude this is an 18 plus game why are you allowing this kid on here?" and his excuse was he couldn't do anything because they sounded Young. When I ask these kids in front of the mod how old they are and they admit to being underage they essentially told me that they can't do anything about it. The excuse I get the most is that it's probably their parents account and they're allowing their kid to use it and they're not going to kick them off for that reason. If this was real life and a 10 year old kid was using their parents ID at an 18 over event they would be kicked out! I've been a mod for everything from discord, IRC, various forms and if we suspect someone's underage we verify we tried to verify to the best of our ability that they are old enough to be on there and I can't say that for horizon worlds. These mods need to do their job. I don't know how they got these jobs I applied for this job as a beta tester with previous experience on forms and management experience in real life and was denied. So I don't know what criteria you have to meet to be a mod on there but as far as I can see the bar set pretty low. What I'm now doing is reporting the moderators every time they don't do their job and will update this review with their user tags so Facebook knows which moderators aren't doing what they're supposed to be and I suggest others do the same

[less...](#)

 Helpful | 438


 **QueenBluntress** Apr 5 at 3:42 PM


★ ★ ★ ★ ★

**Horrible Rude Children Everywhere**

I want to like this game but like VR chat the children. And there are very little children like elementary school on here pretending to get drunk & smoke. There needs to be a platform that adults can enjoy. I don't want to have conversations with children. I am being booted out worlds because I block children. I don't know these kids I don't know their parents & when one of these children gets manipulated by one of these adults the parents won't take responsibility they will blame the Metaverse. I wasted 300\$ on a paperweight. I thought I would be able to communicate with adults and I can't because children interrupt your conversations they join into adult conversations and I just don't want to associate with anyones child. Please make a platform that's for children and let the adults have their own.

[less...](#)


 Helpful | 27


 **TheKnave4** Apr 5 at 9:04 PM

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

**Not much to offer**

This game may be free but I certainly wouldn't recommend it. As many others have said, the game is filled with obnoxious kids looking for a place to be unfiltered bigots. However, beyond that it's just plain boring, there isn't really anything to do. Honestly, just don't waste your time with it, it hasn't got anything to offer and despite all of Facebook's resources they have attempted nothing here that hasn't been done better by others.

 Helpful | 11


 **BadAszJaaz** Feb 1 at 1:49 AM


★ ★ ★ ★ ★

**Needs age restrictions enforced**

There are racist and inappropriate children and adults in horizon world. I have been reported for defending myself and when I requested for oculus support to review the video from my interaction all I was told is to not retaliate and report the person. How can I report someone if I dont know who is being negative towards me. I gained a strike on my account and threatened to loose access all because some children pull me out my avatar character. I don't see me being here all the time or even long. I suggest purchasing games and playing those and only going to horizon worlds when invited by friends. Cause it's not safe at all.

[less...](#)


 Helpful | 99


 **meaning\_of\_life** Jan 9 at 11:16 PM

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

**Kids and mods**

When ever I join a game like vr chat or rec room there's never kids telling to kill your self, telling you their gonna rape your gf/wife or calling you the n word. A kid told me he was gonna kill another kid and when I told a mod about it he said the kid said he was 18+ then called me a a-hole for assuming the kids age. The kid told me he was a 9 year old in front of the mod too. You need to hire some new mods cuz your current ones are shlt.


 Helpful | 70

 **ReenRose** Mar 28 at 1:41 PM

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

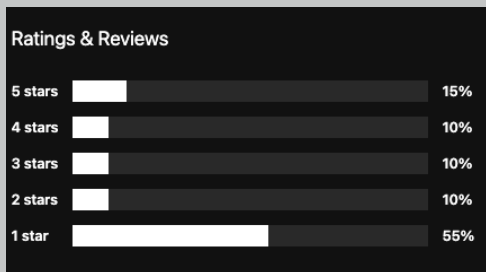
**Terrible**

When a grown man tells a child F you, and then told her to go hang herself... that's just sick. He also told her her mom was a stupid C. People like that should be banned. And the game should have a kids setting, to protect them from disgusting, sad, sorry excuses for a human beings like him. I only gave a star to submit this review.

 Helpful | 8

# Appendix

## HORIZON VENUES USER REVIEWS



### Horizon Venues

**Teen**  
Diverse Content: Discretion Advised  
Users Interact

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ 1,536 Ratings

Venues (Beta Early Access) is now Horizon Venues

Feel the atmosphere of a live concert and the adrenaline rush of watching a big game. Your Facebook login is an all-access pass to concerts, sports, comedy, and more.

Note: This app and some events are not available in all regions. This app is still in development and you may experience technical issues.

**DragonLB1** Mar 16 at 1:15 PM  
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

#### Need Better Privacy Settings Please

I think the idea is great. Basically a virtual Facebook World. With that I have to agree with the majority of mature adults on the annoyance of the kids and immature Avatars floating around in the app. If the idea is for this to be a virtual Facebook of sorts to enjoy venues with your friends then it needs the same privacy settings as Facebook. We need the ability to limit who we want to interact with using a one click as opposed to having to manage each Avatar in the App separately. Also, the ability to block a specific Avatar inside Horizon is great but there should also be an option to unblock them without having to exit the app instead of having to unblock through the Oculus main settings.

[less...](#)

👍 Helpful | 137

**SunshineDiggity** Dec 31 at 6:15 AM  
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

#### Threats by CHILDREN ? This is horrible!

I couldn't believe what was happening in this place. Lots of young kids cursing and making threats. Totally felt uncomfortable with some following me around and harassing me! One kid kept talking about his private and he lets his sister do him???? I'm an adult with adult children and this made me sick! Honestly I just popped in to see what it was all about but I would suggest staying out of all these Horizon rooms. If you're looking for a safe place for you kids to hang out, hard pass here! I'd suggest adults staying clear too. Good grief I almost had a panic attack in VR!! If I ever heard MY children talking like that on such an expensive device I'd definitely be returning the device and banning the child from internet activities. Is this what our future will be? Little brats ruining fun for everyone? I'd LOVE to be a moderator in these rooms! Within 2 minutes I had a kid telling me he was going to find me and called me by my name and he said he was going to blow my F head off! Nice huh? These kids should not only be kicked out of these chat rooms but be muted, reported and fine\$ for the adults that the Internet is provided through. I mean serious threats should have serious consequences! That was a ridiculous thing to witness. My husband was sitting next to me and heard it all. He couldn't believe it. He recorded it on his phone as well. Parents, my advice is to listen in on your kids- enough said

[less..](#)

👍 Helpful | 282

**AB\_SeekInnerPeace** Jan 31 at 8:42 AM  
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

#### WE NEED BETTER PROTECTION

We need better protection. I want a bubble around my avatar that others cannot enter without permission. I want others muted unless I give them permission to speak to me. If they want to say hi, they can wave.

I was in horizon venues and an avatar entered the area and stood behind two female avatars and pretended to grab them sexually. It then knelt in front of another avatar. A couple of nights later, I visited venues again. I was sitting on my real world couch and I decided to stand with my back to a virtual wall so I wouldn't be "sneaky groped". A male avatar that was at the railing came at me full speed and was literally in my avatar...in my face. My initial reaction was to press buttons. I couldn't think fast enough to look at my wrist to select shield. I couldn't even think fast enough to use the joystick to move or remove the headset or turn it off. It just happened so fast. I used both hands and tried to shove him away but that did no good. He returned to the railing and I blocked him. That was not satisfying at all.

I was in horizon worlds at a comedy club and people nearby were chatting over the person on the stage.

[less...](#)

👍 Helpful | 14

**xGothicPunkGirix** Dec 31 at 1:40 PM  
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

#### Not terrible..

I agree with others. I wish they would add an age filter, I do not wanna be in rooms with children or teens.

I would love a way to meet others via communities and or interests.

2d Streams are fine, but this is why Next VR being bought out and squashed hurts VR. 360 cameras are really good now and have been for years, why is there not more content being filmed in it? Concerts, Live Shows, Events, Documentaries etc etc. The lack of 360 and VR content makes Youtube 360 a more attractive way to

[more...](#)

👍 Helpful | 90



For more information on  
our work, please contact  
[corporate@sumofus.org](mailto:corporate@sumofus.org).