

DESIGNED FOR US

A Rights-Based Design Rubric for Digital Platforms

A rights-based design rubric outlining technical design practices that social media platforms can implement to uphold the digital rights that young people deserve online.

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OVERVIEW

In the fall of 2024, [Design It For Us](#) traveled across the United States to college campuses, talking to students about what they believe young people need and deserve from online platforms. We used a unique [polling system](#) to understand what aspects of digital platforms our peers value, what they think is broken, and what they think a better online world might look like. Based on hundreds of voices and visions, the [Declaration of Digital Rights](#) (DDR) was born.

The Declaration of Digital Rights reflects the *lived experiences* of a generation raised online. It captures our values, frustrations, and hopes for a more just and humane digital world. We used this as our foundation to go deeper and ask: **What would it take for platforms to actually uphold these rights through design?** In other words, what concrete, technical design practices would make platforms truly *Designed For Us*?

This rubric aims to answer those questions. Below, we offer Rights and associated Design Indicators that are meant to guide product designers, and represent the best possible version of online platforms in accordance with our vision of a more just online world. Each Right is derived from the polling that generated our Declaration of Digital Rights, exemplified by the qualitative excerpts offered for each Right. Based on extensive research, literature reviews, and conversations with key stakeholders, we outline specific design practices as outlined by our Design Indicators that align with each Right and reflect the experiential knowledge of young people.

We should not need to log off completely just to stay safe. The harms we face online are the result of intentional design choices, and that means they can be redesigned. This rubric offers a practical starting point for platforms that are committed to the wellbeing of young people and to building a healthier digital future.

PERSPECTIVES FROM YOUNG PEOPLE	RIGHT TO...	DDR DESCRIPTION	DESIGN INDICATORS
<p><i>"[Social media would be better if] there were rules and limits to Big Tech's monetization of our data."</i></p>	<p>Privacy</p>	<p>Social media platforms collect endless amounts of data on us. Young people have the right to scroll without Big Tech listening to them on every corner of the internet and selling off that data to the highest bidder. Companies should be responsible for designing social media and AI products that consistently protect and preserve our personal data. Privacy must come before profit.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No nonconsensual sale of user data to third parties. • Data collection opt-in option. • Data minimization: only collect what is strictly necessary. • Clear, accessible policies for how user data is going to be used.¹ • <u>Granular privacy settings</u> that allow users to specify the amount of data they want to share. • <u>End-to-end encryption</u>. • Default private accounts for minors.² • Regular <u>privacy audits</u>. • Middleware for data portability and <u>interoperability</u>, enabling users to easily transfer data across platforms and promote competition.³
<p><i>"[Social media would be better if] it prioritized wellbeing."</i></p>	<p>Safety</p>	<p>There are so many features that social media uses to keep us hooked. Some of those features have proven to be detrimental to young people's mental health or put our safety at risk. Just like seatbelts in cars, consumer protections should be built into these platforms with us in mind. We demand platforms proactively keep us safe from intentional harms associated with their design tactics and business practices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Default age-appropriate algorithmic recommendations. • Safety-first content moderation. Transparency about how moderation systems work. • Anticyberbullying policies. • Age-Appropriate Design Code compliance, such as default systems that prioritize wellbeing for minors.⁴ • Clear reporting tools with transparent processes for review and timely action. • User's ability to opt out of specific content. • Wellbeing resources built into the product • Restrictions on the sharing of sexual content by mandating explicit consent from the individuals depicted.⁵

¹ Moehring, et al. "Better Feeds: Algorithms That Put People First," 2-3.

² Iyer, "Introducing the Neely Center Design Code for Social Media."

³ Schirch, "BLUEPRINT ON Prosocial Tech Design Governance."

⁴ Moehring, et al. "Better Feeds: Algorithms That Put People First."

⁵ Iyer, "Introducing the Neely Center Design Code for Social Media."

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<p><i>"[Social media would be better if] it was designed in the best interest of the users rather than Big Tech."</i></p>	<p>Not be experimented on</p>	<p>Social media and technology companies are constantly rolling out new features on their platforms and products. They use young people as test subjects. Young people are no longer the guinea pigs to be experimented on. Young people have a right to not be tested on by Big Tech without allowing us to provide informed consent.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feature testing opt-in. • Disclosure of product experiments and their results.⁶ • User's ability to disable experimental features. • Ethical review system for new features and their impact on users.
<p><i>"[Social media would be better if] I could better regulate which posts I see, and if I could also better control the amount of time I spend on social media."</i></p>	<p>Agency</p>	<p>Social media can be a beautiful place. It links us to people all over the world, brings us closer to community, and shapes our understanding of the world. But with power comes responsibility. Young people have the right to options provided by platforms that allow us to take back control over our digital lives so we can minimize the bad and maximize the good.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • User control over personal data and how it's used. • Recommendation systems based on survey data, in addition to user engagement.⁷ • Engagement-based feeds opt in.⁸ • Customizable privacy and safety settings. • No forced engagement with manipulative design (e.g., <u>dark patterns</u>). • Tools for content filtering and blocking. • User control over who can interact with their content. • User voice in platform governance, with a system for feedback. • Common knowledge indicators (e.g., "80% of people across 5 political groups agree on this") that build social awareness.⁹

⁶ Moehring, et al. "[Better Feeds: Algorithms That Put People First](#)," 4.

⁸ Moehring, et al. "[Better Feeds: Algorithms That Put People First](#)."

⁷ Moehring, et al. "[Better Feeds: Algorithms That Put People First](#)," 16-22.

⁹ Weyl, et al. "[Prosocial Media](#)."

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<p><i>"I wish I could turn off certain aspects of my feed while [still] seeing content of my close friends."</i></p>	<p>User controls</p>	<p>Suggested posts in feed, new shop features, algorithms, endless scrolling, and never-ending push notifications. Whether you like them or hate them, young people have the right to switch the most harmful features on or off, whenever we choose.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Granular privacy settings (e.g., who can see posts, contact you, etc.) • Easy-to-use parental controls that allow parents to mitigate their child's risk online.¹⁰ • Features that mute, block, or filter content/users. • Algorithmic transparency and control, which allow users to see how the algorithms work and enable them to pick and choose the type of content they want to see more of versus less of.¹¹ • Toggles for disabling potentially harmful features (recommendation algorithms, infinite scroll, autoplay vids).¹² • Customizable notification settings. • Disclosure to users why they are receiving specific ads and controls over what they want to see. • Time management tools that allow users to have control over how much time they are spending on platforms. • Choice over what kinds of content users do/do not wish to see.
<p><i>"[I wish social media had a] complete erase button."</i></p>	<p>Delete</p>	<p>As consumers of digital products, young people have a right to permanently delete our own content and leave social media platforms that are not working for us. Social media platforms should uphold that right, delete our information, and leave us alone. The right to our personal information is solely ours, not social media companies'.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to permanently delete accounts and data, not just deactivation.¹³ • Clear instructions on how to delete data. • Transparency about what data is taken after a user deletes their account.¹⁴ • Data deletion after account deactivation. • Data download before account deletion.

¹⁰Iyer, "Introducing the Neely Center Design Code for Social Media."

¹¹ Moehring, et al. "Better Feeds: Algorithms That Put People First."

¹² Iyer, "Introducing the Neely Center Design Code for Social Media."

¹³ Schaffner, Lingareddy, Chetty. "Understanding Account Deletion and Relevant Dark Patterns On Social Media."

¹⁴ Schaffner, Lingareddy, Chetty. "Understanding Account Deletion and Relevant Dark Patterns On Social Media."

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<p><i>"[Social media would be better if] I had more choice."</i></p>	<p>Choice</p>	<p>One or more social media platforms may not be working for young people. Young people have the right to choose from an array of products, apps, or sites we want to use as alternatives— not just whatever the biggest Big Tech players choose for us.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative algorithms (e.g., non-personalized feeds.) • Multiple authentication options, not just phone numbers. • Open APIs and interoperability with other platforms, where feasible. • <u>Data portability</u> tools that let users easily export their social graph (friend lists), content (posts, photos, messages), and preferences in a machine-readable, standardized format. • APIs that let third-party apps and services integrate with your platform (with user consent).¹⁵ • <u>Open standards</u> like ActivityPub or AT protocol to enable cross-platform content sharing and build infrastructure that supports future interoperability as other apps adopt similar protocols.¹⁶ • Competitive practices that promote the growth of the market.
<p><i>"[Social media would be better if] I could have more power over it."</i></p>	<p>Seat at the table</p>	<p>Increasingly, it seems like decisions about young people's digital lives are being made by stakeholders, lawmakers, and communities that don't represent them. Young people have a right to a seat at the decision-maker's table.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • User representation in platform governance. • Public consultations on major policy changes. • <u>Transparency reports</u> on content moderation and appeals. • Youth advisory board that is representative of cross-cutting identities. • Social and ethical impact monitoring.¹⁷ • Surveys for user feedback and trials.¹⁸ • Disclosure of how platform models communities (e.g., inferred from engagement, declared identity, social graphs). • Ability to see how user data groups and categorizes the user and how that affects what they're shown.¹⁹ • Supporting underserved and emerging communities by <u>subsidizing their visibility</u> and incorporating their feedback into algorithm updates.²⁰

¹⁵ Becky Chao and Ross Schulman, "[Promoting Platform Interoperability.](#)"

¹⁶ Becky Chao and Ross Schulman, "[Promoting Platform Interoperability.](#)"

¹⁷ Peters, et al. "[Responsible AI—Two Frameworks for Ethical Design Practice.](#)"

¹⁸ Moehring, et al. "[Better Feeds: Algorithms That Put People First.](#)"

¹⁹ Weyl, et al. "[Prosocial Media.](#)"

²⁰ Weyl, et al. "[Prosocial Media.](#)"

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<p><i>"[Social media would be better if] it were about connecting in small, close communities rather than being a competition for the attention of the whole world."</i></p>	<p>Connect</p>	<p>One of the most valuable parts of social media is the ability to connect with our friends and family and build community. When Big Tech clogs up our feeds with targeted ads and comparison content, it's antithetical to everything we want out of social media. Young people have a right to build vital relationships online that are not mutually exclusive with a forced acceptance that our identities are Big Tech's revenue stream.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No <u>shadowbanning</u> without explanation. • Fair distribution of reach (not just favoring paid content). • Accessibility features for disabled users. • Reduce amplification of harmful content.²¹ • Optimized for wellbeing over engagement metrics.²² • Banning use of engagement metrics for sensitive content.²³ • Users control their feeds so they can choose who they are interacting with, such as smaller circles. • Reduced <u>intrusive advertising</u>. • Prosocial metrics like <u>user-reported satisfaction</u>.²⁴ • Bridge & balanced-based ranking.²⁵ • Content supported by diverse groups to reduce <u>polarization</u>.²⁶
<p><i>"[Social media would be better if] we knew more about what our information is used for."</i></p>	<p>Transparency</p>	<p>Big Tech has thrived off of the presumption that they are above the law. They leverage their power as private companies to profit from our pain, by design, while shielding themselves in opacity. We as consumers have a right to fair and transparent products that are responsible to the user and the law, not the shareholders nor the CEOs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear explanations of how algorithms work, including detailed transparency in design, input data, <u>metrics</u>, and <u>weighting</u>.²⁷ • Disclosure of <u>content moderation rules</u> and enforcement. • Visibility into how data is used and shared. • Disclosure when AI is being used. • Alerts to users when design features are being added or changed. • Yearly transparency reports. • Democratic platform oversight, transparency, and audits.²⁸ • Product liability codified for adverse impacts.²⁹ • Ad disclosures, particularly on political content.

²¹ Moehring, et al. "[Better Feeds: Algorithms That Put People First.](#)"

²² Moehring, et al. "[Better Feeds: Algorithms That Put People First.](#)"

²³ Iyer, "[Introducing the Neely Center Design Code for Social Media.](#)"

²⁴ Schirch, "[BLUEPRINT ON Prosocial Tech Design Governance.](#)"

²⁵ Weyl, et al. "[Prosocial Media.](#)"

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<p><i>"[Social media would be better if] it were about connecting in small, close communities rather than being a competition for the attention of the whole world."</i></p>	<p>Accountability</p>	<p>Young people are stepping up to establish innovative legislative solutions that address our needs. Yet, at every turn, Big Tech blocks meaningful legislation to protect their own monetary interests. We demand that our government be accountable to their constituents, not the companies that pay to manipulate legislation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compensation for platform errors (e.g., wrongful suspensions). • <u>Independent audits on recommender system performance</u>.³⁰ • Engagement with <u>regulatory bodies</u>. • Products built with people who specialize in human-computer interaction (HCI) that enhance user well-being to bridge between academia and industry.³¹ • Transparency around <u>social dynamics impact</u> — platforms should measure and report on <u>affective polarization</u>, <u>fragmentation</u>, and <u>false consensus effects</u>.³²
<p><i>"[Social media would be better if] the companies' singular incentive for action was not profit."</i></p>	<p>Be protected from manipulation</p>	<p>Big Tech has relentlessly leveraged innovation against the best interests of users, manipulating our data and weaponizing our well-being against us. Instead of crafting design features meant to support healthy engagement, Big Tech companies have wielded their unchecked power to addict us and harm us while publicly saying otherwise. We have a right to be shielded from these insidious patterns of abuse.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No deceptive UI/UX (e.g., misleading buttons, forced actions).³³ • Clear labeling of ads, sponsored content, and bots. • Protection from addictive design (e.g., infinite scroll defaults). • Restricting impulsive-signal-based feeds, design for intentionality and reflection.³⁴

³⁰ Moehring, et al. "[Better Feeds: Algorithms That Put People First.](#)"

³¹ Chivukula, et al. "[Dimensions of UX Practice that Shape Ethical Awareness.](#)" 10

³² Weyl, et al. "[Prosocial Media.](#)"

³³ Schaffner, Lingareddy, Chetty. "[Understanding Account Deletion and Relevant Dark Patterns On Social Media.](#)"

³⁴ Moehring, et al. "[Better Feeds: Algorithms That Put People First.](#)"

Glossary

- Granular privacy settings - Detailed privacy settings with many specifications for users.
- End-to-end encryption - A data encryption practice where only the sender and recipient can read the contents of a message.
- Privacy audits - Independent evaluations of algorithms, privacy policies, and ux design to ensure user wellbeing and prosocial design.
- Interoperability - The ability to use and exchange information and data over a vast array of platforms through open protocols.
- Dark patterns - User interface designs that manipulate, trick, or coerce users into making decisions they didn't intend to make.
- Data portability - Users' ability to move data across platforms.
- Open standards - Baseline design code to promote prosocial norms and user wellbeing across all digital platforms.
- Transparency reports - Reports to the government outlining the implementation of regulations.
- Subsidizing visibility - Increasing visibility to certain parties/groups/content creators.
- Shadowbanning - Suppressing a user's content without their consent or notice.
- Intrusive advertising - Disruptive advertising methods that hinder the user experience.
- User-reported satisfaction - Metrics that determine users' contentment.
- Polarization - The division of people into opposing groups.
- Metrics and weighting - How much certain qualities of content impact how frequently they are shown in feeds
- Content moderation rules - Company policies for acceptable content.
- Codify - Display/write information in a way that is understandable and clear to users.
- Independent audits on recommender system performance - Reviews on algorithm design and effects by independent parties.
- Social dynamics impact - The effects of technology on independent communities that otherwise wouldn't have interacted with one another.
- Regulatory bodies - Government or independent agencies seeking to create regulations and policies to promote prosocial design.
- Affective polarization - Polarization resulting in strong positive beliefs about one's party and negative beliefs about opposing parties.
- Fragmentation - The alienation of parties, groups, organizations, and individuals.
- False consensus - The notion that everyone agrees about a topic since one is not exposed to opposing viewpoints or opinions.

About the Authors

Kendall Schrohe

Kendall Schrohe works to build the cultural and political infrastructure for a world where people aren't exploited by big tech. She helps lead the Innovator Circle at Design It For Us where she brings together founders creating human-centered alternatives to extractive platforms. At the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC.org), she works on development and platform accountability, supporting EPIC's advocacy, litigation, and research to protect digital privacy rights. She holds a BA in Philosophy from Santa Clara University and is based in DC.

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DESIGN IT FOR Us

About Design It For Us:

Design It For Us is a youth-led coalition leveraging grassroots power to disrupt Big Tech's harmful business models. The coalition is led by a team of people between the ages of 18 and 26 and supported by an array of youth-led organizations, staff, and advisors fighting for a better online world for everyone.