

L.A. SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION VERDICT SET TO UNLEASH MORE LAWSUITS – AND FORCE CHANGES



Attorney Mark Lanier and his team arrive to the Los Angeles County Superior Court during the recent civil trial over his

(Kayla Bartkowski / Los Angeles Times)

- Experts predict the outcome of several recent court cases will change the fate of social media.
- Jurors in a Los Angeles case found Instagram and YouTube were designed to be addictive for young users.
- Social media companies have vowed to appeal the decisions but may be forced to change how they operate due to mounting legal costs.

Two of America's largest tech companies suffered stunning defeats in court this week, sustaining early jolts in what could prove to be a seismic shift in how social media operates amid a new landscape of legal risk.

Meta and Google both vowed to appeal verdicts that were handed down by civil juries in Los Angeles County and Santa Fe, N.M., brushing off the losses as a bit of bad luck.

But attorney Mark Lanier framed the surprise victory in L.A. for his client –

who alleged Instagram and YouTube were designed to be addictive for young users – as nothing short of a cosmic triumph.

“You’ve seen the photographs of Atlas with the world on his shoulders – it’s like that weight’s been set aside,” Lanier said. “This is a righteous moment.”

Few experts believed the test case would succeed. Fewer still thought it would spark a reckoning for the tech titans this spring.

But things began to tilt on Feb. 27, the day after 20-year-old plaintiff Kaley G.M. testified in Los Angeles, when a Delaware court ruled insurers were off the hook for the defense of Instagram parent company Meta in her suit and thousands of related cases claiming social media apps hurt kids.

Now, some predict the constellation of rulings could change the fate of social media and rewrite the future of American tort law.



Parents and family members of victims were at the court in LA to hear the verdict

“This is what we’ve all been hoping for,” said Jonathan Haidt, a social psychologist and author of “The Anxious Generation.” “If we can win on social media, I think humanity has a chance.”

A Jeremiah figure among millennial and Gen X parents for his warnings of impending social media doom and ruin, Haidt didn’t mince words when forecasting the impact of the recent court cases.

“The world is changing its thinking about this,” Haidt said. “These verdicts coming when they do are going to shift it further.”

Many legal experts agreed.

“The broader signal to the marketplace is that the shield is wearing thin,” said Peter Jackson, a privacy and cybersecurity attorney in Los Angeles.

“Seeing the richest and largest companies unable to fend off a litigation like this expands the scope of plaintiffs lawyers who will be willing to mount similar cases.”

A powerful 1996 law called Section 230 has long barricaded internet platforms against most civil liability.

The L.A. case tested the argument that injuries arose not from content the apps hosted but design functions engineered for maximum engagement – even if, as Kaley G.M. alleged, those designs were known to carry risks for children.

This week’s wins could unleash a barrage of new lawsuits, even if the verdicts are overturned in the appellate courts, as the companies, their supporters, and many 1st Amendment experts expect.

By [Sonja Sharp](#), LA Times Staff Writer,
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