

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS

DAINEIRA MANGUM,
*Individually and on behalf of all others
similarly situated,*

Plaintiff,

v.

AMC NETWORKS, INC.,

Defendant.

Case No:

Judge:

JURY TRIAL REQUESTED

CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT

Plaintiff Daineira Mangum, individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated, files this Class Action Complaint against Defendant AMC Networks, Inc. (“Defendant”) for violations of the federal Video Privacy Protection Act, 18 U.S.C. § 2710 (“VPPA”). Plaintiff’s claims arise from Defendant’s practice of knowingly disclosing to a third party, Meta Platforms, Inc. (“Facebook”), data containing Plaintiff’s and other digital-subscribers Class Members’ (i) personally identifiable information or Facebook ID (“FID”) and (ii) the computer file containing video and its corresponding URL viewed (“Video Media”) (collectively, “Personal Viewing Information”). Plaintiff’s allegations are made on personal knowledge as to Plaintiff and Plaintiff’s own acts and upon information and belief as to all other matters.

NATURE OF THE ACTION

1. This is a consumer digital privacy class action complaint against AMC Networks, Inc., as the owner of Shudder, for violating the VPPA by disclosing its digital subscribers’ identities and Video Media to Facebook without the proper consent.
2. The VPPA prohibits “video tape service providers,” such as Shudder, from knowingly disclosing consumers’ personally identifiable information, including “information

which identifies a person as having requested or obtained specific video materials or services from a video tape provider,” without express consent in a stand-alone consent form.

3. Like other businesses with an online presence, Defendant collects and shares the personal information of visitors to its website and mobile application (“App”) with third parties. Defendant does this through cookies, software development kits (“SDK”), and pixels. In other words, digital subscribers to Shudder have their personal information disclosed to Defendant’s third-party business partners.

4. The Facebook pixel is a code Defendant installed on Shudder allowing it to collect users’ data. More specifically, it tracks when digital subscribers enter Shudder or Shudder’s accompanying App and view Video Media. Shudder tracks and discloses to Facebook the digital subscribers’ viewed Video Media, and most notably, the digital subscribers’ FID. This occurs even when the digital subscriber has not shared (nor consented to share) such information.

5. Importantly, Defendant shares the Personal Viewing Information – *i.e.*, digital subscribers’ unique FID and video content viewed – together as one data point to Facebook. Because the digital subscriber’s FID uniquely identifies an individual’s Facebook user account, Facebook—or any other ordinary person—can use it to quickly and easily locate, access, and view digital subscribers’ corresponding Facebook profile. Put simply, the pixel allows Facebook to know what Video Media one of its users viewed on Shudder.

6. Thus, without telling its digital subscribers, Defendant profits handsomely from its unauthorized disclosure of its digital subscribers’ Personal Viewing Information to Facebook. It does so at the expense of its digital subscribers’ privacy and their statutory rights under the VPPA.

7. Because Shudder digital subscribers are not informed about this dissemination of their Personal Viewing Information – indeed, it is automatic and invisible – they cannot exercise reasonable judgment to defend themselves against the highly personal ways Shudder has used and continues to use data it has about them to make money for itself.

8. Defendant chose to disregard Plaintiff's and hundreds of thousands of other Shudder digital subscribers' statutorily protected privacy rights by releasing their sensitive data to Facebook. Accordingly, Plaintiff brings this class action for legal and equitable remedies to redress and put a stop to Defendant's practices of intentionally disclosing its digital subscribers' Personal Viewing Information to Facebook in knowing violation of VPPA.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

9. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 1331 over the claims that arise under the Video Privacy Protection Act, 18 U.S.C. § 2710.

10. This Court also has jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 1332(d) because this action is a class action in which the aggregate amount in controversy for the proposed Class (defined below) exceeds \$5,000,000, and at least one member of the Class is a citizen of a state different from that of Defendant.

11. Venue is appropriate in this District pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391 because Defendant does business in and is subject to personal jurisdiction in this District. Venue is also proper because a substantial part of the events or omissions giving rise to the claim occurred in or emanated from this District.

THE PARTIES

12. Plaintiff Daineira Mangum is an adult citizen of the State of Illinois and is domiciled in the State of Illinois. Plaintiff began a digital subscription to Shudder in 2021 and continues to maintain the subscription to this day. Plaintiff has had a Facebook account from

approximately 2010 to the present. During the relevant time period she has used her Shudder digital subscription to view Video Media through Shudder while logged into her Facebook account. By doing so, Plaintiff's Personal Viewing Information was disclosed to Facebook pursuant to the systematic process described herein. Plaintiff never gave Defendant express written consent to disclose her Personal Viewing Information.

13. Defendant AMC Networks, Inc.:
 - a. Is a publicly traded corporation headquartered in New York, New York.
 - b. Owns multiple streaming services, cable channels, and movie theatres, including Shudder, a horror film streaming service launched in 2015.
 - c. In 2020, AMC announced Shudder passed the one million subscriber milestone.¹
 - d. Shudder has an annual revenue of approximately \$12 million.²
 - e. Shudder includes a Videos section which provides a broad selection of video content.
 - f. Combined, AMC Networks, Inc. and Shudder are used by numerous U.S. digital media viewers.

FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

A. Background of the Video Privacy Protection Act

14. The VPPA generally prohibits the knowing disclosure of a customer's video rental or sale records without the informed, written consent of the customer in a form "distinct and separate from any form setting forth other legal or financial obligations." Under the statute,

¹ See: Horror Streaming Service Shudder Passes Major Milestone, available at <https://www.gamespot.com/articles/horror-streaming-service-shudder-passes-major-milestone/1100-6482460/> (Last Accessed: September 7, 2022)

² See: The Current State of Shudder, available at <https://www.thestreamingblog.com/the-current-state-of-shudder/#:~:text=Viewers%20can%20stream%20Shudder%20using,million%2C%20with%20just%2060%20employees.> (Last Accessed: September 7, 2022)

the Court may award actual damages (but not less than liquidated damages of \$2,500.00 per person), punitive damages, equitable relief, and attorney's fees.

15. The VPPA was initially passed in 1988 for the explicit purpose of protecting the privacy of individuals' and their families' video rental, purchase and viewing data. Leading up to its enactment, members of the United States Senate warned that “[e]very day Americans are forced to provide to businesses and others personal information without having any control over where that information goes.” S. Rep. No. 100-599 at 7-8 (1988).

16. Senators at the time were particularly troubled by disclosures of records that reveal consumers' purchases and rentals of videos and other audiovisual materials. As Senator Patrick Leahy and the late Senator Paul Simon recognized, records of this nature offer “a window into our loves, likes, and dislikes,” such that “the trail of information generated by every transaction that is now recorded and stored in sophisticated record-keeping systems is a new, more subtle and pervasive form of surveillance.” S. Rep. No. 100-599 at 7-8 (1988) (statements of Sens. Simon and Leahy, respectively).

17. In proposing the Video and Library Privacy Protection Act (later codified as the VPPA), Senator Leahy stated that “[i]n practical terms our right to privacy protects the choice of movies that we watch with our family in our own homes. And it protects the selection of books that we choose to read.” 134 Cong. Rec. S5399 (May 10, 1988). Thus, the personal nature of such information, and the need to protect it from disclosure, is the inspiration of the statute: “[t]hese activities are at the core of any definition of personhood. They reveal our likes and dislikes, our interests and our whims. They say a great deal about our dreams and ambitions, our fears and our hopes. They reflect our individuality, and they describe us as people.” *Id.*

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