Social Media Giants Must Face Expert Testimony On Harm

By **Craig Clough**

Law360 (September 23, 2025, 5:05 PM EDT) -- A California state judge ruled Monday that jurors set to consider claims against major social media technology companies for allegedly causing harm to young users' mental health will be allowed to hear expert testimony about potential injuries inflicted by the design and operation of the platforms.

The order from Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Carolyn B. Kuhl rejected arguments from defendants Meta Platforms, Inc., Snap Inc., ByteDance and Google to prevent the majority of the testimony in upcoming **bellwether trials** in the consolidated litigation of hundreds of cases.

The companies sought to reject the testimony on the grounds that it would violate Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which generally immunizes social media platforms from claims based on third-party content posted to the platforms, but the judge held that the testimony is allowable if it focuses on the design of the platforms themselves.

"Here, liability for negligence cannot be based on a Defendant's decision to allow certain content to appear platform," the judge wrote. "However, a Defendant may be held liable for harm caused feature or activity that was part of the design or operation of the Defendant's social media platform if a jury finds that the Defendant was negligent in the design or operation of the social media platform and also find that the design or operation of the social media platform was a substantial factor in causing a Plaintiff's injury."

The judge also wrote that "as this court previously has ruled, Defendants may be held liable if the design or operation of Defendants' platforms themselves is a substantial factor in causing Plaintiffs' to become addicted to or otherwise engaged in social media use in a manner that causes them harm."

The defendants also sought to prevent the 11 experts from testifying under the Sargon standard, which was established in the California Supreme Court's 2012 decision in Sargon Enterprises Inc. v. University of Southern California 🔴 regarding the standards governing the admissibility of expert opinion testimony.

Under Sargon, trial courts must evaluate proposed expert testimony for sufficient scientific backing, similar to the Daubert standard in federal court. The judge allowed 10 of the 11 experts to testify, saying they met the Sargon standard.

"This ruling affirms the strength of the scientific evidence supporting our claims," lead counsel for the plaintiffs said in a statement. "The Court recognized that social media platforms are not just passive conduits of content—they are engineered environments that can profoundly affect adolescent brain development and harm mental health."

Counsel for the defendants did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The Los Angeles Superior Court multidistrict litigation has a **parallel federal proceeding** pending in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, where parents, school districts and dozens of state attorneys general similarly claim social media companies deliberately make children habitual users to the detriment of their mental health.

Loach is represented by Joseph G. VanZandt and Davis Vaughn of the Beasley Allen Law Firm,

Mariana A. McConnell of Kiesel Law LLP, Rachel Lanier of The Lanier Law Firm PC, and Rahul Ravipudi of Panish Shea Ravipudi LLP.

Meta is represented by Alexander L Schultz, Ashley Simonsen and Michael Imboscio of Covington & Burling LLP.

Snap is represented by Jonathan H. Blavin, Rose Leda Ehler, Victoria A. Degtyareva, Ariel Teshuva, and Lauren Bell of Munger Tolles & Olson LLP.

TikTok is represented by David M. Mattern and Geoffrey M. Drake of King & Spalding LLP.

YouTube is represented by Christopher C. Chiou, Matthew K. Donohue, Samantha Machock, Lauren Gallo White and Brian M. Willen of Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati PC, Joseph G. Petrosinelli and Ashley W. Hardin of Williams & Connolly LLP, and Yardena R. Zwang-Weissman, Brian Ercole and Stephanie Schuster of Morgan Lewis & Bockius LLP.

The case is Social Media Cases, case number JCCP5255, in the Superior Court of the State of California, County of Los Angeles.

--Editing by Vaqas Asghar.