

Starbucks fails to block internet porn: Free wi-fi in its cafes putting youngsters at risk

By Daniel Martin



A spokesman for Starbucks confirmed that no filter was in place to block porn, adding they were working on a solution

Children are at risk of being exposed to porn in their local Starbucks because the firm has failed to filter adult material from its free wi-fi.

The coffee chain was warned a year ago that youngsters could see 'the most obscene pornographic sites' being viewed by other customers in their stores – but did nothing.

There are also concerns children could visit Starbucks to look at adult sites they are barred from seeing in their home.

The scandal was revealed just weeks after it emerged that the firm has paid no tax in the UK for the past three years – despite sales exceeding £1billion.

Baroness Massey, a former chairman of the Family Planning Association, told the House of Lords she was boycotting Starbucks over its failure to 'set an example' over access to web porn.

She also called on the Government to write to all high street firms to remind them of their responsibility to filter out harmful material.

A minister told her he was 'alarmed' by the revelations. Costa Coffee, Starbucks' main rival, pointed out that it blocks adult material over its stores' wi-fi, while McDonald's also applies a filter.

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The Daily Mail is campaigning for an automatic block on online porn, with over 18s able to access adult sites by 'opting in' following a strict age check.



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Baroness Massey was speaking in a Lords debate on a Private Members' Bill introduced by Baroness Howe – wife of former Tory chancellor Geoffrey – to implement an 'opt-in' system.

'Some time ago, McDonald's told its wi-fi supplier that it did not want customers coming in to bring up pornographic images people sitting on nearby tables may see,' she said.

'How many other high street brands take a similar responsible view?'

Referring to one case she had heard from a concerned parent, she said: 'In the pub, where children are not admitted, the wi-fi is provided by O2.

MINISTERS appear to have come out against the campaign for an automatic block on online porn.

Culture minister Lord Younger of Leckie yesterday told the Lords that it is the responsibility of parents to ensure their child does not view adult material – the argument put forward by internet giants such as Google.

He added: 'What constitutes

porn is not black and white. To coin a phrase, it's Fifty Shades of Grey.' He said the Government would be unable to support a Bill that would impose a block.

But John Carr, of the Children's Charities' Coalition on Internet Safety, said: 'There is nothing illiberal about taking steps to prevent children from getting access to material they were never meant to see.'

In Starbucks, where children are allowed, the wi-fi is provided by BT Openzone.

'O2's wi-fi services do not allow access to pornographic websites. In Starbucks anyone can have full access to anything the internet has to offer including the most obscene pornographic websites.

'Until recently I was not aware that Starbucks is so lax about this, or that apparently it pays no tax in this country. I, for one, will never set foot in Starbucks again unless these issues are sorted out.'

A spokesman for Starbucks confirmed that no filter was in place to block porn, adding: 'We have been working on a solution with our provider, BT.'

A spokesman for BT said: 'Wi-fi at our partner sites has traditionally been a business service, largely paid for by credit or debit card. Now that some retailers offer wi-fi for free, the need for parental controls has developed.'