

Russia probes YouTube for 'abusing' dominant position

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Russia is investigating YouTube as it ramps up pressure on foreign tech platforms

Russia has launched a probe against YouTube for "abusing" its dominant position in the market by making "biased" decisions about comment

moderation, a government regulator said on Monday.

The move comes as Russia ramps up pressure on foreign tech platforms, with Moscow stepping up its efforts to control the Russian segment of the internet.

The Federal Anti-Monopoly Service said that YouTube's rules relating to the suspension or deletion of accounts are "opaque, biased and unpredictable".

"This leads to sudden blocking and deletion of user accounts without warning and justification," the regulator said in a statement.

It added that "such behaviour can lead to the infringement of the interests of users" and the "restriction of competition".

The regulator said it had launched the probe after receiving a complaint from the Regional Public Centre for Internet Technologies (ROTsIT), a group presenting itself as defending the interests of Russian internet users.

"The fact that the publication and broadcasting of video content in Russia can be regulated by the legislation of other countries is not correct," ROTsIT said in a statement in December announcing its complaint.

Russian authorities in recent months have been irritated by restrictions on several pro-Kremlin films on YouTube.

In September, Russia's media regulator Roskomnadzor accused the US platform of censorship after it added a warning about potential inappropriate content to a documentary about the Beslan school siege in 2004.

Roskomnadzor made similar complaints in March after similar warnings were added to films about World War II and Crimea, which Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014.

President Vladimir Putin has also complained about what he has called the growing influence of large technology companies, saying that they are competing with states.

Calls for protests

YouTube has been a particular boon for Russia's opposition in a country where television is mainly controlled by the authorities.

Putin's best known domestic opponent Alexei Navalny has for years released investigations into corruption on the platform as well as calls to protest that have garnered millions of views.

His team published its latest video on Sunday calling for [mass protests](#) across Russia Wednesday evening in support of Navalny, who is on hunger strike in a penal colony demanding adequate medical treatment for a litany of ailments. The video has already been viewed nearly three million times.

On Monday Navalny's spokeswoman Kira Yarmysh said on Twitter that she had received an email from YouTube notifying her that Roskomnadzor had ordered the company to delete the video, saying it violated Russian law.

Navalny, 44, was sentenced to two-and-a-half years behind bars for violating parole terms on old fraud charges soon after he returned to Russia in January from Germany, where he was recovering from a near-fatal poisoning.

His team that month called for protests that brought tens of thousands to the streets across the country, with authorities accusing foreign social media platforms of interfering in Russia's domestic affairs by not deleting calls to the rallies.

Earlier this month Russia fined Twitter and TikTok for failing to remove those calls.

Russia regularly fines foreign internet companies like Facebook and Google, which owns YouTube, for failing to comply with its legislation.

In December, Russian lawmakers passed legislation that gave authorities the power to block internet platforms like YouTube if they are deemed to have censored content produced by Russians.

Russia has banned a number of websites that have refused to cooperate with authorities, such as LinkedIn.

In March, Roskomnadzor began throttling Twitter's service speeds, accusing it of failing to remove content related to child pornography, drug use and calls for minors to commit suicide.

The regulator has given the US social media giant a deadline of mid-May to remove the content.

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