

EU probes Facebook, Instagram over child protection

May 16 2024, by Raziye Akkoc



The probe is the second looking into Meta's Facebook and Instagram under the EU's new Digital Services Act.

The EU on Thursday opened a formal investigation into Facebook and Instagram on suspicion the platforms owned by Meta are causing

addictive behavior in children.

The probe is under a mammoth law known as the Digital Services Act (DSA) that forces the world's largest tech firms to do more to protect European users online and clamp down on illegal content.

It is the second investigation into Meta. An earlier one was launched by the European Union last month over fears Facebook and Instagram are failing to counter disinformation.

"We are not convinced that it has done enough to comply with the DSA obligations to mitigate the risks of negative effects to the physical and mental health of young Europeans," the EU's internal market commissioner, Thierry Breton, said.

"We are sparing no effort to protect our children," he added.

A Meta spokesperson defended the company's efforts to protect young users.

"We want young people to have safe, age-appropriate experiences online and have spent a decade developing more than 50 tools and policies designed to protect them," the spokesperson said.

"This is a challenge the whole industry is facing, and we look forward to sharing details of our work with the European Commission."

'No effort to protect children'

In Thursday's announcement, the European Commission, the EU's tech regulator, said it suspected the platforms' systems "may stimulate behavioral addictions in children".

Another issue the commission raised is the so-called "rabbit hole" effect—which occurs when users are fed related content based on an algorithm, in some cases leading to more extreme content.

The commission is also worried that Meta's age-verification tools may not be effective.

The DSA has strict rules to protect children and ensure their privacy and security online, and the EU fears Meta might not be doing enough to meet these obligations.

The EU stressed in a statement that the "opening of formal proceedings does not prejudice its outcome".

There is no deadline for the probe's completion.

Raft of probes

The DSA sits within the EU's powerful legal armory to rein in Big Tech.

Facebook and Instagram are among 23 "very large" online platforms that must comply with the DSA or risk fines that could reach as high as six percent of a platform's global turnover, or even a ban for serious and repeated violations.

Other platforms caught up in DSA scrutiny include Snapchat, TikTok and YouTube.

Brussels has launched a wave of investigations, showing online giants it means business.

In February, the commission began a probe into TikTok, which is owned by Chinese firm ByteDance, on suspicion the hugely popular video-

sharing app may not be doing enough to address negative impacts on young people.

The EU also forced TikTok to suspend its spinoff Lite app's reward schemes in April after warning its "addictive" nature could risk serious damage to users' mental health.

Other investigations have targeted Chinese online retailer AliExpress and social media platform X, which is owned by tech billionaire Elon Musk and used to be called Twitter.

The DSA's remit is wide and also forces digital shopping platform like AliExpress and Amazon to do more to counter the sale of fake and illegal goods online.

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