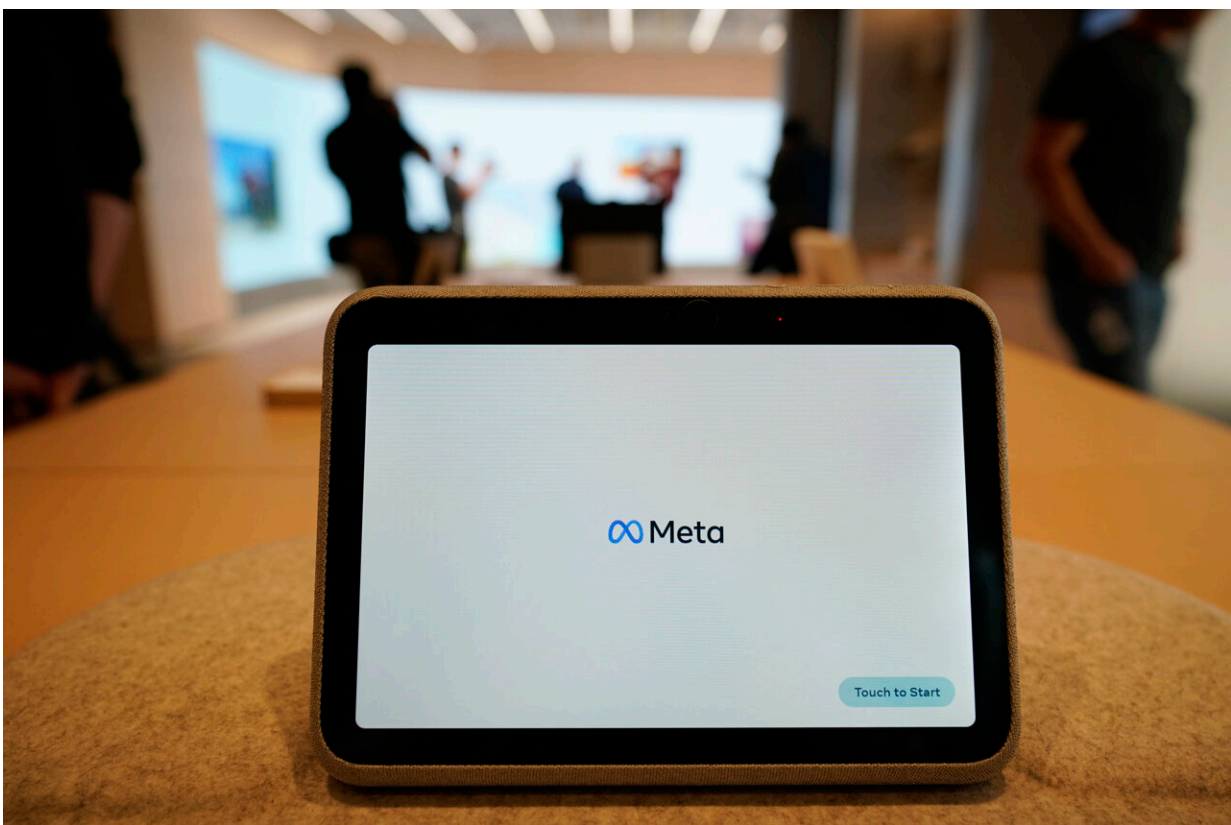


# Meta takes down thousands of Facebook accounts running sextortion scams from Nigeria

July 24 2024, by Barbara Ortutay

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A Meta Portal Go is displayed during a preview of the Meta Store in Burlingame, Calif., on May 4, 2022. 4. A deep dive into political ads on Facebook by researchers at Syracuse University has revealed a sprawling web of advertisements that contain misleading information or scams. Credit: AP Photo/Eric Risberg, File

Meta says it has taken down about 63,000 Facebook accounts in Nigeria that were engaging in financial sextortion scams—along with groups and pages that were trying to organize, recruit and train new scammers.

Sexual extortion, or sextortion, involves persuading a person to send explicit photos online and then threatening to make the images public unless the victim pays money or engages in sexual favors. Recent high-profile cases include two Nigerian brothers who pleaded guilty to sexually extorting [teen boys](#) and young men in Michigan, including one who took his own life, and a Virginia sheriff's deputy who sexually extorted and kidnapped a 15-year-old girl.

There has been a marked rise in sextortion cases in recent years, fueled in part by a loosely organized group called the Yahoo Boys, operating mainly out of Nigeria, Meta said, adding that it removed Facebook accounts and groups run by the group under its "dangerous organizations and individuals" policy.

In January, the FBI warned of a ["huge increase" in sextortion](#) cases targeting children. The targeted victims are primarily boys between the ages of 14 to 17, but the FBI said any child can become a victim.

Meta said its investigation found that the majority of the scammers' attempts did not succeed and mostly targeted [adult men](#) in the U.S., but added that it did see "some" try to target minors, which Meta says it reported to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

The removed accounts included a "coordinated network" of about 2,500 accounts linked to a group of about 20 people who were running them, Meta said.

In April, Meta announced it was deploying new tools in Instagram to protect young people and combat sexual extortion, including a feature

that will automatically blur nudity in direct messages. Meta is still testing out the features as part of its campaign to fight sexual scams and other forms of "image abuse," and to make it tougher for criminals to contact teens.

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Citation: Meta takes down thousands of Facebook accounts running sextortion scams from Nigeria (2024, July 24) retrieved 24 July 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2024-07-meta-thousands-facebook-accounts-sextortion.html>

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