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Facebook and Instagram probed over fears they may be too addictive for children

By [Hanna Ziady](#), CNN

🕒 3 minute read · Published 8:54 AM EDT, Thu May 16, 2024

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Meta is facing increasing scrutiny over the impact of platforms such as Facebook and Instagram on young users. EMS Forster Productions/Digital Vision/Getty Images

London (CNN) — The European Union is worried that Meta is failing to protect children on its platforms, Facebook and Instagram, and has launched a formal investigation that could result in a hefty fine.

The probe is the latest evidence that regulators are increasingly focussing on the harmful impact of Meta's platforms — and other social media — on young users, including by encouraging addictive behavior.

The European Commission, the EU's executive arm, will consider whether Meta (META) has complied with its obligations under the Digital Services Act (DSA), the bloc's sweeping new law for online platforms.

The legislation requires online platforms to put in place measures to protect children, including by preventing them from accessing inappropriate content and ensuring a high level of privacy and safety. Non-compliance could result in companies being fined as much as 6% of their global revenue or being forced to change their software.

The European Commission is concerned that Facebook's and Instagram's online interfaces "may exploit the weaknesses and inexperience of minors and cause addictive behavior," it said in a statement Thursday.

"The Commission is also concerned about age assurance and verification methods put in place by Meta," it added, noting that these may not be effective.

In a statement shared with CNN, a spokesperson for Meta responded: "We want young people to have safe, age-appropriate experiences online and have spent a decade developing more than 50

have safe, age-appropriate experiences online and have spent a decade developing more than 50 tools and policies designed to protect them. This is a challenge the whole industry is facing, and we look forward to sharing details of our work with the European Commission.”

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Investigation into child exploitation on Meta platforms leads to arrests of three men

A report the company submitted to the European Commission last September, detailing how its platforms protect minors, was not enough to assuage regulators’ concerns.

“We are not convinced that (Meta) 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,” Commissioner Thierry Breton, said in the statement. “We are sparing no effort to protect our children.”

Meta has faced growing scrutiny over the impact of its platforms on young users in recent years. The social media giant has been sued by various US school districts and state attorney generals in lawsuits related to youth mental health, child safety and privacy.

Earlier this month, an investigation by the New Mexico attorney general into the potential dangers of Meta’s platforms resulted in the arrests of three men charged with attempted sexual abuse of children.

Meta has also been frequently caught in the crosshairs of EU regulators, including over its handling of advertising by scammers and foreign election meddlers ahead of upcoming EU elections, as well as over disinformation and illegal content on its platforms linked to the war in Gaza.

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