

EU warns Elon Musk after Twitter found to have highest rate of disinformation

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The EU has issued a warning to Elon Musk to comply with sweeping new laws on fake news and Russian propaganda, after X – formerly known as Twitter – was found to have the highest ratio of disinformation posts of all large social media platforms. The report analysed the ratio of disinformation for a new report laying bare for the first time the scale of fake news on social media across the EU, with millions of fake accounts removed by TikTok and LinkedIn. Facebook was the second worst offender, according to the first ever report recording posts that will be deemed illegal across the EU under the Digital Services Act (DSA), which came into force in August. Nevertheless, Facebook and other tech giants, including Google, TikTok and Microsoft, have signed up to the code of practice the EU drew up to ensure they could get ready in time to operate within the confines of the new laws. Twitter left the code of practice but it is obliged under the new law to comply with the rules or face a ban across the EU. “Mr Musk knows he is not off the hook by leaving the code of practice,” said the European commissioner Věra Jourová, who is responsible for the implementation of the new anti-disinformation code. “There are obligations under the hard law. So my message for Twitter/X is you have to comply. We will be watching what you do.” “X, formerly Twitter ... is the platform with the largest ratio of mis/disinformation followed by Facebook,” she told reporters. The 200-page report is an account of the work the large platforms have done in the first six months of 2023 to prepare for compliance with the new law and lifts the lid on the behind-the-scenes efforts made by Facebook and others to crack down on Russian propaganda, hate speech and other disinformation. “The Russian state has engaged in the war of ideas to pollute our information space with half truth and lies to create a false image that democracy is no better than autocracy,” said Jourová. LinkedIn’s owner, Microsoft, stopped 6.7m fake accounts being created and removed 24,000 pieces of fake content YouTube, owned by Google, told the EU it had removed more than “400 channels involved in coordinated influence operations linked to the Russian-state sponsored Internet Research Agency”. Tiktok removed almost 6m fake accounts and 410 unverifiable adverts. Google removed advertising from almost 300 sites linked to “state-funded propaganda sites” and rejected more than 140,000 political advertisers for “failing identity verification processes”. Meta, the report says, expanded its fact-checking to 26 partners covering 22 languages in the EU, now also including Czech and Slovak. It reported that 37% of users also cancelled sharing when notified of fake news, a sign the EU says of the value consumers put on labelling disinformation. The EU is particularly concerned about continued Russian propaganda in social media before key elections in Slovakia on Sunday and in Poland on 15 October. TikTok, which was recently fined €345m (£300m) for breaching data protection rules concerning children, is also working to comply with the DSA. Its factchecks cover Russian, Ukrainian and 17 other

languages and a new partnership with the Reuters news agency. The report said that through this network it checked 832 videos related to the war in Ukraine of which 211 were removed. Microsoft, another participant in the code of practice, told the EU it had either promoted information or downgraded questionable information in relation to 800,000 search queries about the war in Ukraine. Jourová said the report was evidence that Russia was engaged in a “war of ideas” and that Kremlin disinformation was still very prevalent across the large platforms. She said the Kremlin had chosen Slovakia more than Poland as “fertile soil” for division and interference with democracy. She said one of her main messages to the large platforms was to be aware of elections, including those for the European parliament next year, and the “risk of disinformation”. She said the Kremlin propaganda was “a multimillion-euro weapon of mass manipulation aimed both internally at the Russians as well as Europeans and the rest of the world. And we must address this. The very large platforms must address this risk.” The war in Ukraine was the most frequent topic for propaganda but the platforms also reported hate speech in relation to migration, LGBTQ+ communities and the climate crisis. “I think it is one of the advantages of disinformation, is that they are so predictable,” said Jourová, making it easier for factcheckers to find. On Twitter, she said “disinformation actors were found to have significantly more followers than their non-disinformation counterparts and tend to have joined the platform more recently than non-disinformation users”.