

TikTok reward-to-watch feature suspended after EU threats to block it

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A TikTok service offering rewards such as gift vouchers for watching videos has been suspended by the company shortly after the EU threatened to block it amid fears of addiction among children. On Monday the digital commissioner, Thierry Breton, said the Chinese-owned video-sharing platform had “failed to prove” the feature on TikTok Lite, which launched recently in France and Spain, complied with obligations under sweeping new Digital Service Act (DSA) laws. He said the EU believed the service could be as “addictive as cigarettes” and gave the company 48 hours to respond with any fresh defence. In a pre-emptive move, TikTok wrote to Breton to say it would suspend the service. Breton said on Wednesday: “Our children are not guinea pigs for social media. The DSA ensures the safety of our EU online space.” It is the first non-compliance case taken by the EU since the DSA came into force in August last year. It is the latest blow to hit the company, after the US Senate voted on Tuesday to pass a bill that will either ban TikTok or force a sale of its US business. Breton expressed dismay that the company had gone ahead with the service knowing that the European Commission had already raised concerns with TikTok over general safeguarding issues relating to children. “I take note of TikTok’s decision to suspend the TikTok Lite ‘reward programme’ in the EU, following the opening of our case on 22 April and the communication of our readiness to adopt interim measures,” he said. “Our cases against TikTok on the risk of addictiveness of the platform continue, including the investigation to establish whether the launch of TikTok Lite was done in compliance with the DSA. “We suspect that this feature could generate addiction and that TikTok did not do a diligent risk assessment and take effective mitigation measures prior to its launch.” TikTok, owned by the Chinese company ByteDance, will suspend the “task and reward programme” service in France and Spain for 60 days for new users as of Wednesday. It will also stop providing the service to existing subscribers by no later than 1 May and pause the rollout in other EU countries. The suspension of the service is the first example of the EU using the powers under the DSA, which forces social media companies including X and Facebook to comply with EU laws or risk sanctions, which can include ban or fines of up to 6% of global revenues. A spokesperson for the European Commission confirmed the two formal proceedings into TikTok remained active, including this recent case regarding TikTok Lite. The first case was launched in February and concerns safeguarding of children on TikTok, including the issues of age verification, advertising transparency and the risk management of addictive design and harmful content. A TikTok spokesperson said: “TikTok always seeks to engage constructively with the EU Commission and other regulators. “We are therefore voluntarily suspending the rewards functions in TikTok Lite while we address the concerns that they have raised”