7 takeaways from Mark Zuckerberg's appearance before the House

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg made his second of two appearances before Congress on Wednesday, enduring a five-hour session of questions from members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee. In contrast to their amiably confused counterparts in the Senate, members of the House committee demonstrated a generally better command of how Facebook works and how its efforts to develop richly detailed advertising profiles for billions of people have created privacy concerns around the world.

As with yesterday, Facebook sought to promote steps it has already taken to address the fallout of the Cambridge Analytica data privacy scandal. But House members spent less time on Cambridge Analytica in favor of asking about a broader range of subjects, including how Facebook tracks people around the web, privacy protections for minors, and Facebook's consent decree with the Federal Trade Commission.

Here are the seven most notable developments from today's hearing.

Facebook made its clearest endorsement yet of bringing European privacy protections to people around the world. Facebook has offered mixed messages over the past week on whether it would abide by Europe's General Data Privacy Regulation, or GDPR, when it goes into effect in May. Today Zuckerberg told Congress that yes, it would roll out GDPR-style protections globally. "The GDPR has a bunch of different important pieces," Zuckerberg told Rep. Janice Schakowsky (D-

IL). “One is offering controls over – that we’re doing. The second is around pushing for affirmative consent and putting a control in front of people that walks people through their choices. We’re going to do that, too. … We’re going to put a tool at the top of people’s apps that walks them through their setting.”

Some representatives think Facebook has violated its consent decree with the Federal Trade Commission. By the terms of a 2011 consent decree, Facebook is required to identify and address emerging threats to user privacy. Rep. Robert Latta (R-OH) was among several House members who interrogated Zuckerberg about whether Facebook had abided by its terms. “Why didn’t the audits that you had to submit under the FTC consent decree find these problems?” Latta asked. Zuckerberg responded, to Latta and others, that Facebook believes it has complied with the decree.

Facebook is under pressure to explain how it tracks people around the web – and why. Zuckerberg was asked repeatedly on Tuesday on how Facebook collects data from people as they navigate around the internet, whether or not they have Facebook accounts or are logged into them. He was also asked how Facebook stores data about which websites people visit, and whether it creates so-called “shadow profiles” – accounts for people who either have not created Facebook accounts yet, or gotten rid of them.

Zuckerberg offered two explanations for tracking web behavior. One is security – if Facebook didn’t track people, he said, the platform couldn’t prevent someone from downloading every public Facebook page. “Even if someone isn’t logged in, we track certain information, like how many pages they’re accessing, as a security measure,” he said. The other, of course, was ad targeting. “We may also collect information to make it so that those ads are more relevant and work better on those websites,” he said, adding that users can opt out of ad targeting.

But under pressure from Rep. Ben Lujan (D-NM), Zuckerberg said he was not familiar with the "shadow profiles." He also could not answer how many data points Facebook collects on the average user — or non-user.

Zuckerberg's own profile was part of the Cambridge Analytica data leak. Among the millions of people whose data was improperly obtained by Cambridge Analytica was the CEO himself. That revelation came thanks to a question from Rep. Anna Eschoo (D-CA). "Was your data included in the data sold to malicious third parties?" Eshoo asked. "Your personal data?" "Yes," Zuckerberg answered. He didn't offer any additional information.

More members of Congress are pressing Facebook to offer additional privacy protections to minors. Yesterday, Zuckerberg faced questions over Messenger Kids, his company's app for chatting with children as young as 6. Today, Rep. Joe Barton (R-TX) pressed Zuckerberg to create new privacy protections for all minors. "Is there any reason that we couldn't have just a no-data-sharing policy, period, until you're 18?" Barton asked. "Nobody gets to scrape it; nobody gets to access it. It's absolutely, totally private. … What's wrong with that?" Zuckerberg would not commit to adding additional privacy protections. "The reality that we see is that teens often do want to share their opinions publicly," Zuckerberg said — sidestepping the question by conflating public posting by users with data collection on Facebook's part.

Conservatives are trying to turn one page's temporary suspension into a cause célèbre. Republican House members repeatedly pressed Zuckerberg on the case of Lynnette "Diamond" Hardaway and Rochelle "Silk" Richardson, two pro-Trump vloggers who were told their content was "unsafe to the community." The sisters have alleged that Facebook has prevented them from notifying their followers about new posts and throttled their reach. (It's not clear how much of that is

directed at the vloggers, and how much is related to recent changes to Facebook's News Feed algorithm.) "Let me tell you something right now," said Rep. Marsha Blackburn (R-TN). "Diamond and Silk is not terrorism." Zuckerberg said the page had been deemed unsafe in error.

Congress wants Facebook to do more to fight opioid sales online. People sell just about everything using Facebook ads, and that includes opioids. Even though drug sales are against Facebook's terms — not to mention illegal — several representatives reported that drug dealers were slipping through the cracks. "Your platform is still being used to circumvent the law, and allow people to buy highly addictive drugs without a prescription," said Rep. David McKinley, (R-WV). "With all due respect, Facebook is actually enabling an illegal activity and, in so doing, you are hurting people." Zuckerberg said the company would try to improve its content moderation team. "I think that there are a number of areas of content that we need to do a better job policing on our service," he said.

For a complete look at today's hearing, check out our live blog.

https://www.theverge.com/2018/4/11/17226356/mark-zuckerberg-congress-hearing-house-energy-commerce-takeaways