Facebook confirms ‘massive ranking failure’

Less than 24 hours after we learned about Meta’s smear campaign against rival social network TikTok, it has been confirmed that Facebook was showing harmful content to users over a period of six months.

The failure was detailed in an internal document obtained by the Verge. It detailed a “massive ranking failure” where Facebook’s systems failed to suppress posts containing nudity, violence and propaganda from Russian state media.

Why we care. Facebook wants to create a brand-safe environment. They’re failing. When Facebook allows ads to appear alongside the types of content it failed to downrank here, that’s incredibly troubling for brands and publishers. Facebook has a history of self-inflicted wounds, scandals and a lack of accountability when issues like these have been exposed and made headlines. To date, it hasn’t irreparably hurt them. The big question is how long brands will stop investing money in a platform that has shown great interest in taking their money but little interest in protecting them from being associated with such harmful content.

What happened. Over a period of six months, due to a ranking bug, Facebook’s feed distributed an unknown amount of dubious content, including debunked misinformation, that it typically downranks. This helped increase views for this content by up to 30 percent globally, the Verge reported.

Meta demotes several types of content – clickbait, engagement bait, and several types of low-quality content and spam. You can read the full list here.

What Meta said. In a statement, Meta spokesperson Joe Osborne confirmed the company had detected inconsistencies in demoting

posts on five occasions, starting in October, which correlated with small, temporary increases to internal metrics. The company blamed it on a software bug and have applied needed fixes March 11. Osborne said the bug did not have “any meaningful, long-term impact on our metrics.”

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About The Author

Danny Goodwin is Senior Editor of Search Engine Land. In addition to writing daily about SEO, PPC, and more for Search Engine Land, Goodwin also manages Search Engine Land’s roster of subject-matter experts. He also helps program our conference series, SMX – Search Marketing Expo. Prior to joining Search Engine Land, Goodwin was Executive Editor at Search Engine Journal, where he led editorial initiatives for the brand. He also was an editor at Search Engine Watch. He has spoken at many major search conferences and virtual events, and has been sourced for his expertise by a wide range of publications and podcasts.
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