Facebook warns it could block news in Canada over proposed legislation

Facebook might ban news sharing in Canada if the country passes legislation forcing the company to pay news outlets for their content (via *The Wall Street Journal*). In a post shared on Friday, Facebook parent company Meta says Canada's proposed Online News Act falsely presumes that it "unfairly benefits from its relationship with publishers."

First introduced in April, the Online News Act compels online platforms like Facebook and Google to share revenue with the publishers they aggregate their news from. The goal of the bill is to ensure news outlets are fairly compensated for their work. Canada's House of Commons Heritage Committee held a meeting about the legislation last week, but Meta says it wasn't invited.

While Google later walked back on its plans after striking deals with media organizations, Facebook reversed its news ban only after Australia amended its legislation. Facebook's temporary ban not only affected news outlets but also ripped down posts from government agencies, like local fire and health departments. Earlier this year, a group of Facebook whistleblowers claimed the move was a negotiation tactic, alleging Facebook used an overly broad definition of what's considered a news publisher to cause chaos in the country. The company maintains the disorder was "inadvertent."

"We may be forced to consider whether we continue to allow the sharing of news content on Facebook in Canada as defined under the Online News Act"

Now Facebook’s prepared to put a block on news in Canada if the country doesn’t change its legislation. Meta says posts with links to news stories make up less than three percent of the content on users’ Facebook feed, adding that the content “is not a draw for our users” nor is it a “significant source of revenue.”

“If this draft legislation becomes law, creating globally unprecedented forms of financial liability for news links or content, we may be forced to consider whether we continue to allow the sharing of news content on Facebook in Canada as defined under the Online News Act,” Meta states.

Meta also claims news outlets benefit from putting their stories on Facebook, and not the other way around. In May, Meta says registered news publishers in Canada received over 1.9 billion clicks over the past 12 months, bringing in an estimated $230 million CAD in value. Google also spoke out about the legislation during last week’s meeting, saying it “will make it harder for Canadians to find and share trusted and authoritative news online,” and that publishers already benefit from the traffic they receive through Google.

Pablo Rodriguez, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, said in a statement obtained by the *WSJ* that Facebook continues “to pull from their playbook used in Australia.” “All we’re asking the tech giants like Facebook to do is negotiate fair deals with news outlets when they profit from their work,” Rodriguez explains.

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