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Facebook and WhatsApp Take Measures Against Platform Abuse

TOPICS: Bots, Platform Abuse, Social Media, WhatsApp, Facebook

In a recent [release](#), WhatsApp has announced it is committed to using the resources at its disposal, including legal action, to prevent abuse that violates its Terms of Service, especially regarding practices such as use of bots, bulk messaging and non-personal use.

WhatsApp has been acting against abuse, mainly based on its technological monitoring tools, such as by banning accounts based on machine-learning classifiers. Beginning on 7 December 2019, however, the company will also take legal action against individuals or companies engaged in or assisting others in violating the platform's policies.

In the announcement, WhatsApp highlights that **the decision to take legal action can be based solely on information found outside the platform, such as public claims** from companies about their ability to use WhatsApp in ways that are abusive or violate the Terms. The announcement is to serve as a notice for companies to **change their practices and business or market propositions before December 2019**.

Abuse of WhatsApp has been gaining attention following government held elections periods, in which several studies pointed to the use of WhatsApp bots to spread **disinformation** and "deep fakes". [Recently](#), the European Commission has published the first reports submitted by signatories of the Code of Practice against disinformation, which was signed in October 2018, by several technology companies, including WhatsApp's owner Facebook.

As part of this enforcement policy, Facebook has also [revealed](#) that it filed a \$9.8 million [lawsuit](#) against South Korean analytics firm [Rankwave](#), for **abusing its developer platform's data** and refusing to cooperate with a mandatory compliance audit and request to delete data.

Rankwave offers users an [Android app](#) that asks user to login with Facebook in order that it can assess the popularity of posts and calculate a "Social Influencer Score". According to the lawsuit, this app misused data collected on Facebook posts, such as location check-ins, by selling data to its clients for ad targeting purposes. Rankwave also instructed its clients to build a Facebook authorization step into their apps in order that they can pass all the user data to Rankwave, which then analyzes biographic and behavioral traits to supply user contact info and ad targeting assistance to the business.

Technology & Regulation Industry Spotlight



In the lawsuit, Facebook stated that Platform Policies restrict Developers from using Facebook data outside of the environment of the app, for any purpose other than enhancing the app users' experience on the app itself. In addition to misusing Facebook data, the company has also delayed responding to a cease-and-desist order and refused to comply with a mandatory audit of its data practices.