

China cracks down on online peddlers of celebrity gossip

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China implemented a controversial cybersecurity law on June 1 is largely aimed at protecting the country's networks and private user details—but also bans the publication of a wide variety of information

Online peddlers of celebrity gossip have fallen foul of China's new cybersecurity law, with officials ordering internet companies to stop "catering to the public's vulgar taste".

The controversial regulation took effect on June 1 and is largely aimed at protecting China's networks and private user details—but also bans the publication of a wide variety of information.

At least 60 social media accounts promoting news and paparazzi photos of China's rich and famous have been shuttered in the crackdown, the Beijing Cyberspace Administration said.

It ordered major internet companies, including Tencent and Baidu, to obey the provision of the new law requiring online news and information services to "serve the direction of socialism and correctly guide public opinion".

They should "take effective measures to curb the embellishment of [celebrity](#) sex scandals and the flaunting of lavish celebrity wealth, and stop catering to the public's vulgar taste," the statement published Wednesday said.

China has some of the world's tightest controls over web content, protected by what is called "The Great Firewall", and restrictions on free speech have increased since President Xi Jinping assumed power in 2012.

Attempts to access some of the targeted accounts on the popular WeChat messaging app on Friday triggered an error message saying they had been "sealed" on suspicion of violating regulations.

Among the rumour-mill accounts shut down were the popular "China's Number One Paparazzo Zhuo Wei" and "Detective Zhao Wu'er", who are known to tail celebrities and expose love affairs and secret children.

Their demise sparked a mixed reaction from social media users.

"The government's hand has stretched too far," one lamented on China's Twitter-like Weibo.

"The arts should be free."

But others supported the crackdown, noting that gossip accounts "had no boundaries".

"There's nothing regrettable about shutting down these trashy blogs," said one post.

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