

China's Tencent: Tech world must tackle privacy concerns

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Seng Yee Lau , senior executive vice president of Tencent, China's biggest tech company, answers the Associated Press, in the Royal Monceau Hotel, in Paris, Thursday, May 24, 2018. Seng Yee Lau told The Associated Press that the industry needs to pay more attention to the risks posed by advancing technologies and the explosion in personal data circulating online. (AP Photo/Thibault Camus)

China's biggest tech company says the industry needs to tackle users'

privacy concerns and the risks posed by advancing technologies.

Seng Yee Lau, senior executive vice president of Tencent, also argues that companies and governments must invest more in education, to reduce inequalities and ensure that technologies like online games and social networks don't damage human civilization.

"Every single thing that we do in business today, unfortunately or fortunately, we don't just think about the business purpose anymore," he told The Associated Press on Thursday after meeting French President Emmanuel Macron and other tech leaders at a conference in Paris.

The largest Chinese tech company by stock market value, Tencent is known for its messaging network WeChat. The ruling Communist Party requires Tencent and other social media services to monitor what their users do and to enforce censorship guidelines.

Tencent has denied suggestions it helps police eavesdrop on its 1 billion WeChat users. But the company and other social media services are obligated by law to store user information for six months for use by law enforcement.

Lau came to Paris at a time of growing public concern in the West that tech giants are failing to protect personal data, avoiding taxes or allowing the propagation of hate speech or lies.



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As Europe introduces stringent new [data protection](#) rules this week, Lau said, "We shouldn't be avoiding it. We should be paying a concerted effort in learning more about issues of privacy."

He said companies have to take into account how their business affects society.

Tencent began fighting rumors and fake news online in 2015, and introduced limits on how much time users can play its games amid concerns about addiction. And the [company](#) is using one popular game,

"The Honor of Kings," to help teach history.

Tencent works closely with the Chinese government on mass education programs that reach some 300 million people. Lau acknowledged that those programs need to consider data protection concerns, but he didn't elaborate on how.

Those programs include online art classes for pupils in remote, rural regions, and textbooks you can download on a cell phone.



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While Lau acknowledged that new technologies can pose risks, he said parents should stop panicking that artificial intelligence will deprive their children of jobs.

"We have to give a bit more faith to human nature" and the eternal need for creativity and human skills other than engineering, he said. "That's not something we ought to be worried about."

Despite its massive size, fast growth and \$3.6 billion in profits in the first quarter alone, Lau said Tencent has no immediate plans for expansion abroad and wants to stay loyal to its huge domestic market.

"Until or unless we are certain we could deliver a value much better than the existing players, we have no business being in that country," he told The AP.

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