

UK lawmakers slam Facebook's evasive answers

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In this March 29, 2018, file photo, the logo for Facebook appears on screens at the Nasdaq MarketSite in New York's Times Square. Facebook said Thursday, June 28, that it will release more information on all advertisements running on its service. The move is part of a broader effort to encourage "transparency" in its operations. (AP Photo/Richard Drew, File)

The head of the U.K. Parliament's media committee slammed Facebook on Friday for what it described as evasive behavior in answering

questions on fake news.

Committee chair Damian Collins said that Facebook's claims that it was unable to distinguish between political and non-political advertising is "difficult to believe." He cited several examples of where Facebook's responses were "found wanting," including their refusal to share how many resources they were devoting to security.

"In these responses, Facebook continue to display a pattern of evasive behavior - a pattern which has emerged over the course of our inquiry," he said. "The company appears to prefer minimal over rigorous scrutiny."

Facebook did not respond directly to any of Collins charges of being evasive, but pointed out that it had appeared before Collins' committee in the past.

"We welcome the chance to help the committee with its inquiry which is why Facebook's CTO Mike Schroepfer gave nearly five hours of testimony to the (media) committee in April and we have responded to every question the committee has sent us," the company said in a statement. It added that it continues to "engage" with the committee to "provide any further information they may need."

Facebook is under scrutiny globally over allegations that political consultancy Cambridge Analytica used data from tens of millions of Facebook accounts to help U.S. President Donald Trump's 2016 election campaign.

Collins has made no secret of his displeasure that Facebook chief Mark Zuckerberg has declined to testify before the committee. Nor did members of the committee hide their frustration with Schroepfer during his testimony in April.

The unassuming engineer was forced to defend the company against suggestions that it was cavalier with user data and had done little to stem the spread of fake news. The session, which lasted over four hours, covered many of Facebook's perceived sins, with lawmaker Julian Knight accusing the company of "bullying journalists, threatening academic institutions and impeding investigations by legal authorities."

Collins was clearly unimpressed with the follow-up letter Facebook sent to address points raised in the testimony. He attached the letter from Facebook outlining questions that he wanted answered.

"They finish their letter by citing the number of times they have provided evidence to our committee," Collins said. "Highlighting this fact seems to tell us that Facebook seem reluctant to be subject to continual scrutiny, and prefer that their engagement on these issues be limited to only the minimum necessary, or when pressed, despite them being one of the most influential companies in the world with no public accountability or oversight other than to their shareholders."

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