

Twitter chief says was unprepared for 'weaponized' social media efforts

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CEO of Twitter Jack Dorsey told lawmakers the platform was ill-equipped for "weaponized" social media influence campaigns

Twitter was "unprepared and ill-equipped" for the vast campaigns of manipulation that affected social media in the past few years, chief

executive Jack Dorsey told lawmakers Wednesday.

Dorsey, appearing before a Senate Intelligence Committee hearing on foreign influence campaigns on social media, said the messaging service was set up to function as a "public square" but failed to deal with "abuse, harassment, troll armies, propaganda through bots."

"We aren't proud of how that free and open exchange has been weaponized and used to distract and divide people, and our nation," he told senators.

"We found ourselves unprepared and ill-equipped for the immensity of the problems we've acknowledged."

Dorsey said Twitter has stepped up its effort to protect what he called a "healthy public square" but that the challenges were daunting.

"We've learned from 2016 and more recently from other nation's elections how to help protect the integrity of our elections," he said.

"But we all have to think a lot bigger, and decades past today. We must ask the question 'what is Twitter incentivizing people to do (or not do), and why?' The answers will lead to tectonic shifts in how Twitter, and our industry, operates. Required changes won't be fast or easy."

Facebook and Google

The hearing also included Facebook's chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg, who repeated the leading social network's acknowledgements about failing to crack down on influence campaigns stemming from Russia.

"We were too slow to spot this and too slow to act," Sandberg told the

panel. "That's on us. This interference was completely unacceptable. It violated the values of our company and of the country we love."



Facebook number two executive Sheryl Sandberg repeated that the social network was too slow to respond to foreign influence campaigns

Senator Mark Warner told the hearing that social media firms "were caught flat-footed by the brazen attacks on our election" and questioned whether Silicon Valley is capable of confronting the problem of foreign influence.

"I'm skeptical that, ultimately, you'll be able to truly address this challenge on your own," he told the hearing with Dorsey and Facebook

chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg. "Congress is going to have to take action here."

Google was also invited to attend the Senate hearing but declined to send its chief executive Sundar Pichai or parent firm Alphabet chief Larry Page.

In a written statement, Google chief legal officer Kent Walker promised to maintain efforts to thwart foreign interference in US elections.

"Google remains deeply concerned about attempts to undermine democratic elections," Walker said. "As we promised the committee last year, we have now fulfilled all four of our commitments to provide increased transparency in election advertising."

The Senate hearing was the first of two on Capitol Hill focusing on social media, ahead of a House panel session where Dorsey was to speak on "transparency and accountability."

In prepared remarks, Dorsey rejected claims that Twitter operates on the basis of political bias.

"Twitter does not use political ideology to make any decisions, whether related to ranking content on our service or how we enforce our rules," Dorsey said in his written testimony.

"We believe strongly in being impartial, and we strive to enforce our rules impartially."

Dorsey's comments come days after President Donald Trump accused technology firms of "censorship" and suppressing conservative voices.

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