China orders microblog operators to tighten censorship

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Ratcheting up control over Chinese microblogs, regulators ordered operators on Friday to set up a mechanism to remove false information after the most popular service was criticized for allowing prohibited material to spread.

The order adds to a steady drumbeat of new measures imposed by the government of President Xi Jiinping to tighten control over what China's public can see and say online while still trying to reap the economic benefits of internet use.

Microblog operators must set up a mechanism to monitor accounts for false information and delete it, said an order by the Cyberspace Administration of China. It said operators must keep a copy of what users post for six months.

The ruling Communist Party encourages internet and social media use for business and education but has steadily tightened control to block material deemed subversive, pornographic or socially unhealthy.

Last weekend, Sina Weibo was ordered to suspend some services for one week after authorities accused it of allowing material promoting "wrong public opinion orientation," obscenity and "ethnic discrimination."

That followed a report that Sina Weibo managers found some celebrities and companies paid marketing firms to make them appear more popular by creating phony accounts to increase their number of online followers.

Sina Weibo said it had 376 million active users as of September. That would make it the world's most popular microblog service, ahead of Twitter in the United States, which has 330 million.

Also Friday, the CAC said it ordered operators of online platforms to close three accounts it accused of spreading gossip about the private lives of celebrities.

Regulators will "strengthen strict supervision" of operators of online platforms including Sina Weibo, Tencent Ltd., Baidu Inc. and Youku Tudou Inc., the agency said.

"Vulgar speculation and wantonly spreading gossip about the private lives of stars have seriously disrupted network order and infringed the legitimate rights of citizens," the CAC said on its website. It said that harmed the "physical and mental health of young people."

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