

Facebook probes whether data firm violated policies: report

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Facebook has suspended a US analytics firm for possibly misusing customer data

Facebook has suspended a Boston analytics firm from its site and says it is investigating whether the company's contracts with the US government and a Russian non-profit violated policies, the Wall Street Journal

reported.

The firm, Crimson Hexagon, says its platform allows clients—which include major US corporations—to analyze audiences and to track brand perception and campaign performance.

Citing people familiar with the business, the Journal said the government contracts of Crimson Hexagon, which pulls public data from Facebook, were not approved by Facebook in advance.

Since 2014, US government agencies have paid Crimson Hexagon more than \$800,000 for 22 contracts, the Journal said, citing government procurement data.

Crimson Hexagon has sold its proprietary analytics platform abroad, including to Turkey and Russia, where in 2014 it worked with a non-profit tied to the government, the Journal reported late Friday.

It said Crimson Hexagon appears at least once to have mistakenly received private data from Facebook's Instagram service.

Facebook had requested further evidence from Crimson Hexagon but the Journal quoted a spokesman for the social network as saying that "based on our investigation to date, Crimson Hexagon did not obtain any Facebook or Instagram information inappropriately."

Chris Bingham, a Crimson Hexagon executive, wrote in a Friday blog post that his firm only collects publicly available social media data, an act which is "completely legal."

Bingham says his firm routinely vets potential [government](#) customers to ensure they comply with policies of its "data partners" like Facebook.

"For example, there are special sensitivities about how [government agencies](#) can use online public data, even though that same data is freely accessible by others," he wrote.

Facebook acknowledged this month that it was facing multiple inquiries from US and British regulators about a scandal involving the British consultancy Cambridge Analytica.

In Facebook's worst ever public relations disaster, it admitted that up to 87 million users may have had their data hijacked by Cambridge Analytica, which was working for US President Donald Trump's 2016 campaign.

Cambridge Analytica, which denies the accusations, has filed for bankruptcy in the United States and Britain.

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg said in May that he was rolling out privacy controls demanded by European regulators to Facebook users worldwide because "everyone cares about privacy."

Facebook and other online platforms have also been under pressure to better protect against being used to spread misinformation or promote division, as US intelligence leaders say Russia did during the 2016 US presidential campaign.

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