

## European Leaders Find Backdoor Way To Ban Porn on Social Media

**Plus: Elon Musk accuses the SEC of trying to silence him, Elizabeth Warren gets her antitrust wish, and more...**

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**Age verification rules expand beyond porn sites.** U.S. activist groups have been pushing age verification requirements for porn website visitors as a way to keep kids from viewing adult content. A look at how that's going in some European countries provides another reason to be wary of this plan.

Officials in Germany and the United Kingdom have made clear that age verification rules aren't intended to be applied only to the likes of Pornhub; social media companies that allow racy content are also implicated. Rather than institute platformwide age verification, these companies may simply choose to ban explicit sexual content and its creators.

That's already happening in Germany.

"Twitter has been blocking the profiles of adult content creators in Germany since late 2020, with at least 60 accounts affected to date," noted *Wired* this week. "The move comes in response to a series of legal orders by German regulators that have ruled that online pornography should not be visible to children and must be hidden behind age-verification systems.... The exact number of accounts blocked in this way is unknown."

These accounts are allowed to be seen by Twitter users in other countries. But Germans who try to view their accounts get a message saying the content has been blocked "in response to a legal demand."

Twitter "blocked porn profiles for German users after we instigated legal proceedings. We were actually the first authority in Europe to do so and we will continue," Marc Jan Eumann, chairman of Germany's Commission for the Protection of Minors in the Media, told *Wired*.

The magazine also talked to Paulita Pappel, founder of the European branch of the Free Speech Coalition (an adult industry group against censorship), who said German regulators are "using the protection of minors as an excuse to push forward very conservative policies to bring down porn companies but also smaller sex workers and content creators."

Twitter already has policies in place to limit the visibility of adult content by underage users. The policies in Germany make it so no one can see it.

The U.K. may wind up following Germany's lead. After scrapping a porn age-verification plan a few years ago, British leaders are once again pushing for it, this time as part of a larger online safety bill. And officials have confirmed that it will apply to social media platforms like Twitter and Reddit that allow adult content.

"Ministers confirmed this week that social media sites hosting large amounts of pornographic material, such as Twitter and Reddit, would also have to work under the same age-verification rules as adult content sites," *The Guardian* reported last Sunday. "It means the sites would have to introduce systems to remove adult material in the UK, or introduce age checks to determine whether users are over 18."

"While the government argues that this is about porn websites, what is being proposed is a generalised duty to verify internet viewers' age on websites and services with user-to-user content," Mariano delli Santi of the Open Rights Group told *The Guardian*. "This brings into scope not only pornographic websites but also search engines, social medias, blogs and almost the entirety of the internet as we know it."

"Censors CONSISTENTLY lie about their intentions," commented Gustavo Turner, news editor for the adult entertainment industry publication XBIZ, on Twitter. While they say "we want to prevent children from being harmed" and write "we want to make 'pornographic websites' implement age verification," what winds up happening in practice is "sexual and LGBTQ+ expression get deplatformed."

"Eradicating adult content from open platforms has been one of the core objectives of the leading religiously inspired, U.S.-based groups that are at the forefront of the War on Porn," noted Turner in an article on XBIZ about the U.K.'s age verification proposals.

## **FREE MINDS**

**Elon Musk accuses the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) of trying to chill his speech** in the course of enforcing a settlement agreement related to civil securities charges against the Tesla CEO. Musk was charged with making "false and misleading" statements for tweeting that he was "considering taking Tesla private." As part of a settlement, he and Tesla had to pay \$20 million apiece in fines, Musk had to temporarily step down as the company's chairman, and Tesla had to monitor Musk's public statements.

Now, the SEC is seeking more information from Tesla to see if it and Musk have been complying with their settlement agreement. It's too much, says Musk's lawyer, Alex Spiro.

"The SEC seems to be targeting Mr. Musk and Tesla for unrelenting investigation largely because Mr. Musk remains an outspoken critic of the government," Spiro alleged in a Thursday court filing. "The SEC's outsized efforts seem calculated to chill his exercise of First Amendment rights rather than to enforce generally applicable laws in evenhanded fashion."

## **FREE MARKETS**

**The Justice Department is investigating corporate profits.** "Elizabeth Warren's bizarre theories about corporate greed driving inflation have made their way into federal law enforcement," *Reason's* Eric Boehm reports:

In a press release, the department said its antitrust division would begin to "deter, detect and prosecute those who would exploit supply chain disruptions" to earn what the department calls "illicit profit." The goal of the initiative, according to the department, is to prevent companies from "overcharging customers under the guise of supply chain disruptions."

The problem, of course, is that the supply chain disruptions are quite real—and inflation across the economy is the result of both those large-scale issues and government actions, including last year's \$1.9 trillion stimulus bill and protectionist policies. To the extent that private companies are raising prices, those things are the likely culprits—and higher prices are the market's way of allocating scarce goods most efficiently, not evidence of price gouging.

"The DOJ and FBI would rather launch a global investigation of 'illicit' supply chain profiteering than acknowledge the obvious and inevitable result when unprecedented fiscal and monetary stimulus combines with decades of protectionism and regulatory sclerosis," says Scott Lincicome, director of general economics and trade policy for the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank.

Anyone who thought increased and expanded antitrust action was only going to harm big tech companies is starting to get a rude awakening.

## QUICK HITS

- The percentage of American adults identifying as LGBTQ has surged over the past 10 years, according to a new Gallup poll. This jump—from 3.5 percent in 2012 to 7.1 percent last year—is driven by Gen Z (up to 20.8 percent LGBTQ identification in 2021, from 10.5 percent in 2017) and millennials (up to 10.5 percent in 2021, from 5.8 percent in 2012).
- Behind the new Republican strategy on abortion restrictions.
- Nineteen Austin police officers have been indicted on charges of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon, stemming from their reactions during 2020 protests, the Associated Press reports.
- Oregon's Supreme Court says former *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof doesn't meet the requirements to run for governor.
- Fifty-four current and former California highway patrol officers have been charged with theft and fraud.
- Ottawa police have arrested two "Freedom Convoy" organizers.
- Los Angeles County Sheriff Alex Villanueva doesn't want city leaders to talk about "deputy gangs".
- The FBI is putting together a special team to target cryptocurrency crimes, to be titled the Virtual Asset Exploitation Team.