

Email Dump Suggests Facebook Traded User-Data Access For Ad Spending

Are you friends with Facebook? Or are you a rival who doesn't spend on ads? If you were the latter a few years ago, you might not have had much luck in getting access to the company's growing mountain of user data. An extraordinary [cache of emails](#) sent between Facebook executives between 2012 and 2012 that was published by the U.K. Parliament on Wednesday suggested Facebook leveraged access to the data of its users to get other companies to buy ads on its platform.

Companies like Netflix and Airbnb got special access to user data, by signing what Facebook called an "Extended API Agreement" that allowed them to be "whitelisted." But rivals like Vine did not.

In one 2013 email from Facebook's director of platform partnerships Konstantinos Papamiltiadis, the executive tells staff that "apps that don't spend" will have their permissions revoked.

"Communicate to the rest that they need to spend on NEKO \$250k a year to maintain access to the data," he wrote. NEKO is an acronym used at Facebook to describe app ads, according to [The Wall Street Journal](#).

The email was marked in the documents published by U.K. member of parliament Damien Collins as an example of linking data access to advertising spending on Facebook. The data trove stemmed from an inquiry by British lawmakers into Facebook's treatment of its users' personal data in the wake of the Cambridge Analytica revelations, which showed the political targeting firm had accessed as many as 87 million users' data without their consent. Facebook knew about the breach, but didn't verify the firm had destroyed the data, or make it public, till the eve of an explosive report from the *New York Times* and *The Guardian*.

Founder Mark Zuckerberg, who faced the worse crisis of his career over the Cambridge Analytica scandal, on Thursday defended Facebook's dealings with its app on the platform — highlighting decisions to prevent "sketchy" or "shady" apps from operating and restricting apps that wouldn't have a benefit for Facebook users.

"To be clear, that's different from selling people's data. We've never sold anyone's data," [he wrote](#).

Facebook has been dogged for years by the broader accusation that it "sells users' data," and the emails certainly don't point to that being the case. They do however put a new wrinkle in the allegation: Facebook doesn't appear to have sold user data, but it does seem have leveraged it to push back on competitors and get more advertising dollars.

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