

Facebook could be SHUT DOWN if social media users' privacy has been used for political manipulation

FACEBOOK could face a complete shutdown, should its users' privacy be threatened.

By **AARON BROWN**



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Facebook could be shut down if there is evidence the personal data of citizens is being systematically harvested, an Indonesian cabinet member has threatened.

Minister of Communication and Information Technology, Rudiantara made the threat ahead of the Indonesian presidential race.

There are growing fears the democratic election could be influenced by social media websites, like Facebook.

"If I have to shut them down, then I will do it," Rudiantara said in an interview on Friday at his residence in Jakarta.

Rudiantara pointed out that Indonesia has previously blocked encrypted messaging app, Telegram.

"I did it. I have no hesitation to do it again," the Communications Minister added.

Facebook is not the only US social media firm to receive the warnings, with Twitter and YouTube also in the spotlight.

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Both Twitter and Google have previously agreed to work with the government to monitor content, however, would not comment on the latest government initiatives.

Indonesia, Southeast Asia's largest economy, is home to more than 260 million people, of which around 115 million are Facebook users.

Rudiantara, who like many Indonesians uses one name, says Facebook could face severe penalties should it fail to comply with a 2016 decree on the protection of personal information.

"There are administrative sanctions. I can issue the warning letter to them. There will also be criminal sanctions," he told **Bloomberg Business**.

Facebook employees could face up to 12 years in jail and a fine of up to 12 billion rupiah (\$873,000 or £620,000), Rudiantara said.

"I want an undertaking that there were no Indonesian Facebook users whose information or data was used by Cambridge Analytica," he added.

"If that is the case, I can chase them, ask the police."

The news **comes weeks after Facebook was rocked by a monumental data privacy scandal.**

Facebook came under fire following the revelation that Cambridge Analytica, a UK-based political firm hired by Trump for the 2016 campaign, had improperly accessed information on 50 million users.

The news has wiped-off almost \$50 billion from Facebook's market value as investors fear the dealings with Cambridge Analytica could permanently damage the social network's reputation, deter advertisers and invite tougher regulation.

Co-founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg made his first public appearance since the scandal broke, addressing the Cambridge Analytica revelations on CNN.

The 33-year-old billionaire told the news network that he would be happy to appear before US Congress "if it's the right thing to do".

"This was a major breach of trust, and I'm really sorry that this happened," he added.

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Zuck did not explicitly apologise for the improper use of data by Facebook, and his plans did not represent a big reduction of advertisers' ability to use Facebook data, which is the company's lifeblood.

Facebook has said the data was harvested by Aleksandr Kogan, a psychology academic, who created an app on the platform that was downloaded by 270,000 people.

It says he then violated its policies by passing the data to Cambridge Analytica.

Facebook requested the data of 50 million users be deleted from its database, but allegedly never followed-up to check its users' information was safely disposed of.

"I don't know about you, but I'm used to when people legally certify that they are going to do something, that they do it," Mr Zuckerberg told CNN.

"But I think this was clearly a mistake in retrospect."

Alexander Nix, the head of Cambridge Analytica who was suspended last month, said in a secretly recorded video that his company had played a decisive role in Trump's election victory.

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At the time, Facebook's settings allowed app developers to access the personal data of not just the people who used their app, but of all of their friends as well.

Mr Zuckerberg said Facebook has already taken the most important steps to prevent such a situation from happening again.

He told CNN the site would be reviewing thousands of apps in an "intensive process".

Facebook will ban developers who do not agree to an audit, and an app's developer will no longer have access to data from people who have not used that app in three months.

He said he was confident Facebook could "get in front" of the problem.

"This isn't rocket science. There's a lot of hard work we have to do to make it harder for nation states like Russia to do election interference," he said.

