

Facebook Worked With Russian Spies: U.K. Seizes Thousands of Emails

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(Bloomberg) -- Internal emails flagged by a U.K. lawmaker as evidence Facebook Inc. knew Russian-linked entities were harvesting data earlier than previously thought, have become the latest battleground between the social media giant and U.K. lawmakers.

Following a [public hearing Tuesday](#) between international lawmakers and a senior Facebook executive, the U.S. company released a heavily redacted internal email chain from late 2014, that showed concerns over large volumes of data requests appearing to originate from Russian-based IP addresses.

A later email, from a redacted sender, said that the requests instead came from Pinterest servers, and may be evidence of a technical error. Competing internet companies routinely build

tools that let developers of one platform request data from another, to help users share content between both sites or see which of their friends have recently signed up.

The email chain, two pages-long, is part of a trove of documents that potentially number in the thousands, currently held by U.K. lawmakers and likely to be released early next week, according to two people with knowledge of the situation.

A committee of U.K. lawmakers obtained the documents after it compelled the founder of a U.S. software company, Six4Three, to hand over a large cache during a business trip to London. The Six4Three founder had obtained the documents as part of a legal discovery process in a U.S. lawsuit against Facebook that his company has brought against the social network in California.

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Facebook has previously asked the judge at the San Mateo County Superior Court, to levy sanctions against Six4Three and its founder for violating his order sealing the documents. A hearing has been set for Friday in San Mateo, where the judge is set to [hear an explanation](#) of the leak.

"Facebook have broken the seal on the documents now," said Damian Collins, head of the committee investigating the impact of fake news. "We intend to do that too. It'll be interesting to see if the court in California also decides to do the same."

Pinterest didn't immediately respond to a request to comment.

Collins, who has been [repeatedly calling](#) on Facebook to hand over data regarding Russian influence on its platform, said in a [hearing Tuesday](#) that he had reviewed an email from a Facebook engineer highlighting suspicious Russian-linked data harvesting on Facebook two years before 2016.

Previously, Facebook has said it was unaware of the sort of Russian activity it has been accused of allowing to take place on its platform, until after the 2016 election.

Facebook said that the document cited by Collins was taken out of context. "The engineers who had flagged these initial concerns subsequently looked into this further and found no evidence of specific Russian activity," the company said in an email to Bloomberg, adding that the incident related to "legitimate" data requests from Pinterest.

Lawmakers from the U.K. and other nations lambasted Facebook during the hearing for abusing public trust and failing to provide honest answers to questions about the misuse of user data.