

The FTC is investigating data collection at YouTube, Facebook, and seven other companies

Including Discord, Facebook, Reddit, and Snap

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Illustration by Alex Castro / The Verge

The Federal Trade Commission announced Monday that it is launching a new inquiry into the privacy practices of some of the largest tech companies and social media platforms in the world.

In a press release published Monday, the FTC announced that it is ordering nine social media and video streaming companies — including Amazon, TikTok’s parent company ByteDance, Discord, Facebook, Reddit, Snap, Twitter, WhatsApp, and YouTube — to provide data on how they collect and use personal information provided by their users. The companies have 45 days to respond.

Each of the nine companies was contacted for comment. A Twitter spokesperson told *The Verge*, “We’re working, as we always do, to ensure the FTC has the information it needs to understand how Twitter operates its services..”

A Discord spokesperson said, “Discord takes user privacy very seriously and we look forward to working with the FTC to answer their questions about our privacy practices.”

The FTC’s orders were authorized as part of a wide-ranging investigative inquiry and do not serve specific law enforcement purposes. However, the FTC could pursue enforcement actions should it find wrongful behavior throughout the study. In the agency’s Monday orders, the FTC requested that the companies provide information related to how they collect personal data, how that data determines which ads and content users are shown, and whether they “apply algorithms or data analytics to personal information.”

The commission voted 4-1 to approve the orders with Commissioner Noah Phillips dissenting, saying that the probe was too wide-ranging to produce useful results.

“These digital products may have launched with the simple goal of connecting people or fostering creativity. But, in the decades since, the industry model has shifted from supporting users’ activities to monetizing them,” three FTC commissioners who voted to approve the orders said in a joint statement Monday. “This transition has been fueled by the industry’s increasing intrusion into our private lives.”

In February, the FTC used [this same investigative authority](#) to request information on past acquisitions made by big tech companies, including Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Microsoft. Last week, the FTC sued Facebook to [unwind its acquisitions](#) of Instagram and WhatsApp.

Updated 12/14/20 at 5:10 PM ET: Included statements from Twitter and Discord.