EU LAUNCHES INVESTIGATION AGAINST BOOKING OVER SCAMS



The European Commission opened an investigation against the biggest hotel booking platform, Booking Holdings, to assess if it has taken sufficient measures to protect consumers from false advertising and online scams.

In parallel, the EU is investigating whether Booking.com violated transparency rules in its advertising practices by offering "boosted" ads — **a paid feature that allows accommodation providers to increase their visibility in the search results in exchange for higher commissions.**

It is the first case of this kind initiated by the EU authorities against a technology giant based in the Netherlands (subsidiary of the American Booking Holdings Group), which falls under the jurisdiction of the Digital Services Act (DSA).

"Europeans should be able to make digital bookings with confidence that they will not fall victim to fraud," said Henna Virkkunen, executive vice president of the European Commission, responsible for technology sovereignty, security and democracy. "Under the DSA, there are very clear responsibilities for platforms and businesses, and they need to take them seriously," she added.

Booking Holdings highlighted in a statement that "security, trust and the protection of personal data" are among its "top priorities." The company added that they are always "committed to working with the relevant governments, regulators, law enforcement and industry to fight cybercrime and online fraud and protect travelers and partners."

If the investigation against Booking.com finds the company has violated any rules, the firm will be at risk of a fine. The platform will have a chance to defend itself and suggest how the problems it is accused of can be resolved.

The European Commission seeks to find out whether Booking.com had taken due measures to protect its users from false advertisements, which can appear in the search results on the platform. Some of the ads may contain references to fictitious accommodation, while in other cases, the description of the property may differ significantly from the images.

Meanwhile, the EU is also investigating whether the company has failed its users by not taking action against phishing. In some cases, criminals may fraudulently register on the platform and use the data of people who have booked a hotel through Booking.com to induce them to pay money.

Another issue that has raised concerns for the European Commission is related to "boosted ads" that appear at the top of the search engine results. The Commission reiterated that "users should be able to easily recognize that these 'boosted ads' are in fact advertising."

The Commission cited numerous complaints and reviews left on the Internet by users who felt like they were deceived through Booking.com. "There have been many complaints, including from consumer associations and hotel groups," noted a representative of the European Commission.

This is not the first time that the European Commission has investigated a company for abuse related to online fraud. In April 2024, an investigation against the parent company of Facebook - Meta Platforms – was opened. The EU is known to have launched two dozen antitrust and security probes against major technology companies in the past years.

The proceedings against Booking.com indicate the EU's willingness to impose stringent rules on DSA requirements related to consumer rights and transparency of information for all online platforms.

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