

Facebook Rolls Out News Feed Change That Blocks Watchdogs from Gathering Data | The Markup

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Facebook has begun rolling out an update that is interfering with watchdogs monitoring the platform.

The Markup has found evidence that Facebook is adding changes to its website code that foils automated data collection of news feed posts—a technique that groups like NYU’s Ad Observatory, The Markup, and other researchers and journalists use to audit what’s happening on the platform on a large scale.

The changes, which attach junk code to HTML features meant to improve accessibility for visually impaired users, also impact browser-based ad blocking services on the platform. The new code risks damaging the user experience for people who are visually impaired, a group that has struggled to use the platform in the past.

The updates add superfluous text to news feed posts in the form of ARIA tags, an element of HTML code that is not rendered visually by a standard web browser but is used by screen reader software to map the structure and read aloud the contents of a page. Such code is also used by organizations like NYU’s Ad Observatory to identify sponsored posts on the platform and weed them out for further scrutiny.

[...]

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