

Platform research access in Article 31 of the Digital Services Act: Sword without a shield? | Verfassungsblog

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The issue of research access is becoming ever more urgent in platform governance. Over the past year, dominant platforms such as Facebook have repeatedly interfered with independent research projects, prompting calls for reform. The matter went mainstream in October 2020, when, only weeks before the US elections, Facebook tried to shut down an independent audit of their political advertising by NYU. Last month, they tightened the screws even further by suspending the researchers' Facebook accounts, stripping them of access to the Ad Library API and Crowdtangle research tools. And closer to home, Facebook also retaliated against data collection by the Berlin-based NGO AlgorithmWatch, sending them "thinly veiled threats" of legal action on the grounds that independent data collection violated the platform's Terms of Service. Platforms are shaping up as gatekeepers not only of online content and commerce, but of research into these phenomena.

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