

Facebook's Data Partnerships Scandal

Why in news?

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Facebook is facing fresh scrutiny over its data-sharing deals with smartphone manufacturers across the world.

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What is the deal about?

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- Facebook entered into “**data sharing partnerships**” with over 60 smartphone makers.

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- They include brands like Apple, Samsung, Microsoft and BlackBerry.

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- Major Chinese players Huawei, Lenovo, Oppo, and TCL are also in the list.

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- Facebook gave smartphone makers “**deep access**” to data on users and friends.

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- The deals facilitated APIs (application programming interfaces), the ones from Facebook.

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- These have allowed device makers to create the FB experience on their operating systems.

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- The deals helped **Facebook** expand its **reach**.

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- This was through features such as the ‘like’ and ‘share’ buttons being integrated into the operating systems of many devices.

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- The deals remained in place for over a decade until recently, when it started to wrap up some of them.

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What are the concerns?

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- There is lack of clarity on the sort of deals struck with different players.
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- But the API would have given most manufacturers access to some data.
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- They have given rise to concerns over how Facebook handles user data and privacy.
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- There is fear that device makers got a free hand to collect user data.
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- Users' friends' relationship statuses, political leanings, locations, etc. became accessible.
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- It has also been alleged that Facebook's partnership deals with the device makers violated a consent decree.
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- It is signed by the social networking company with the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC).
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- Under this, Facebook was required to obtain explicit consent from users before sharing their data with a third party.
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- Consent is also required before changing or overriding users' privacy settings.
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- If found in violation of this decree, Facebook can face legal action.
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What is the present tussle?

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- The FTC had in 2011 noted that third party developers had access to nearly all of a user's data.
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- It had pulled up Facebook over the so called "Verified Apps" programme.
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- The programme did not verify the security of participating apps, and for handing over users' personal information to advertisers.
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- Facebook has however refuted the accusation of violation of the deals.
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- It says that all deals were tightly controlled.
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- Also, that the partnerships were not the same as the ones it had with app developers.
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- Partnerships prevented Facebook information from being used for any other purpose than to recreate Facebook-like experiences.
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- The smartphone makers have also denied these allegations.
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- Nevertheless, the concerns over these deals cannot be brushed aside.
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- This is especially given the Facebook's record with third party apps.
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Source: Indian Express

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