

Google's AI Overviews hit by EU antitrust complaint from independent publishers

By Foo Yun Chee

BRUSSELS (Reuters) -Alphabet's Google has been hit by an EU antitrust complaint over its AI Overviews from a group of independent publishers, which has also asked for an interim measure to prevent allegedly irreparable harm to them, according to a document seen by Reuters.

Google's AI Overviews are AI-generated summaries that appear above traditional hyperlinks to relevant webpages and are shown to users in more than 100 countries. It began adding advertisements to AI Overviews last May.

The company is making its biggest bet by integrating AI into search but the move has sparked concerns from some content providers such as publishers.

The Independent Publishers Alliance document, dated June 30, sets out a complaint to the European Commission and alleges that Google abuses its market power in online search.

"Google's core search engine service is misusing web content for Google's AI Overviews in Google Search, which have caused, and continue to cause, significant harm to publishers, including news publishers in the form of traffic, readership and revenue loss," the document said.

It said Google positions its AI Overviews at the top of its general search engine results page to display its own summaries which are generated using publisher material and it alleges that Google's positioning disadvantages publishers' original content.

"Publishers using Google Search do not have the option to opt out from their material being ingested for Google's AI large language model training and/or from being crawled for summaries, without losing their ability to appear in Google's general search results page," the complaint said.

The Commission declined to comment.

The UK's Competition and Markets Authority confirmed receipt of the complaint.

Google said it sends billions of clicks to websites each day.

"New AI experiences in Search enable people to ask even more questions, which creates new opportunities for content and businesses to be discovered," a Google spokesperson said.

The Independent Publishers Alliance's website says it is a nonprofit community advocating for independent publishers, which it does not name.

The Movement for an Open Web, whose members include digital advertisers and publishers, and British non-profit Foxglove Legal Community Interest Company, which says it advocates for fairness in the tech world, are also signatories to the complaint.

They said an interim measure was necessary to prevent serious irreparable harm to competition and to ensure access to news.

Google said numerous claims about traffic from search are often based on highly incomplete and skewed data.

"The reality is that sites can gain and lose traffic for a variety of reasons, including seasonal demand, interests of users, and regular algorithmic updates to Search," the Google spokesperson said.

Foxglove co-executive director Rosa Curling said journalists and publishers face a dire situation.

"Independent news faces an existential threat: Google's AI Overviews," she told Reuters.

"That's why with this complaint, Foxglove and our partners are urging the European Commission, along with other regulators around the world, to take a stand and allow independent journalism to opt out," Curling said.

The three groups have filed a similar complaint and a request for an interim measure to the UK competition authority.

The complaints echoed a U.S. lawsuit by a U.S. edtech company which said Google's AI Overviews is eroding demand for original content and undermining publishers' ability to compete that have resulted in a drop in visitors and subscribers.

(Reporting by Foo Yun Chee. Editing by Jane Merriman)