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WhatsApp Drops Channels Launch in Russia Over Ban Threat

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Dimitri Karastelev / unsplash

U.S. tech company Meta will not launch its WhatsApp Channels service in Russia following threats that it could be blocked for allowing the public dissemination of information, The Moscow Times' Russian service reported Monday.

"The product will not be available to users inside Russia in the near future," an anonymous Meta representative told the outlet.

Meta announced plans earlier this month to expand WhatsApp Channels to 150 countries. The new feature provides a platform for channel administrators to share updates, news, and information among other users on the app.

Russia's media watchdog Roskomnadzor threatened to block WhatsApp if Channels began distributing "banned information."

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At the time, Russia's Communications Minister Maksut Shadayev said "everything will be alright" with the messaging app in Russia, but did not provide further details or comment specifically on Roskomnadzor's warnings over a possible ban.

A Russian court blacklisted WhatsApp's parent company Meta, which also owns Facebook and Instagram, as an "extremist" organization shortly after Moscow's troops invaded Ukraine in early 2022.

The ruling did not affect WhatsApp since, as the court argued, it lacked the functionality for the public dissemination of information.

WhatsApp has over 73 million estimated users in Russia.

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