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Instagram Verification Counts as 'Financing Extremism,' Russian Court Says

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Sergei Kiselev / Moskva News Agency

A Moscow court has ruled that Russians who pay for Instagram verification risk criminal prosecution for "financing extremism," a decision that could carry penalties of up to eight years in prison.

The Kuntsevo District Court in Moscow issued the ruling on July 14 after reviewing a prosecutor's claim that the purchase of a blue verification checkmark amounted to sending money to Instagram's parent company Meta.

Meta has been banned as an extremist organization in Russia since March 2022, shortly after the invasion of Ukraine.

The court accepted prosecutors' argument that paying for Instagram verification could "contribute to the financing of an extremist organization" under Article 282.3 of Russia's

Criminal Code.

In June, the same court banned the Russian company RosMedia and the Kyrgyz firm Aura because they had offered account verification services, also declaring them extremist.

Instagram was blocked in Russia in March 2022, when prosecutors argued that Meta allowed users to call for violence against Russian soldiers. Despite the ban, many Russians still access the platform through VPN services.

The ruling follows a broader crackdown on foreign tech companies and their services.

Earlier this year, Russia outlawed advertising on platforms owned by organizations deemed "undesirable" or "extremist."

Violators face fines ranging from 2,000 rubles ($22) for individuals to as much as 500,000 rubles ($5,500) for companies.

Starting Sept. 1, Russians can also be fined retroactively for ads placed on such platforms before the law was enacted.

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