

Twitter, Inc.

Services evaluated:

- **Twitter** [Social networking & blog]
- **Periscope** [Video & photo sharing]

Rank

5

Score

55%

Difference

▲ 1.89

Rank among 12 internet and mobile ecosystem companies

0% ————— 100%

Key findings

- Twitter was less transparent about policies and practices affecting freedom of expression and privacy than most of the U.S. internet and mobile ecosystem companies evaluated in the Index.
- It improved its disclosure of how it responds to government requests to restrict content or accounts by committing to carry out due diligence on such requests, but published limited data about the requests it received.
- Twitter failed to disclose sufficient information about its security policies, earning the second-lowest score on these indicators.

Key recommendations

- **Improve governance oversight:** Twitter should disclose if and how it conducts human rights impact assessments and offer clearer mechanisms to address users' privacy complaints.
- **Be more transparent about data retention policies:** Twitter should disclose more comprehensive information about what user data it retains and whether it deletes all user data when users terminate their accounts.
- **Clarify security policies:** Twitter should improve disclosure of its policies for responding to data breaches and encrypting user content and communication.

Analysis

Twitter ranked fifth out of 12 internet and mobile ecosystem companies, disclosing less about its processes to ensure respect for freedom of expression and privacy than most of its U.S. peers.¹ Twitter stood out for disclosing more than most of its peers regarding policies affecting users' freedom of expression, and it improved its disclosure slightly regarding its governance processes and options users have to obtain their user data, among other things.² However, despite these improvements, the company's performance continued to lag. It failed to disclose sufficient information about its policies to ensure the privacy and security of users' data, and of its governance processes in place to ensure respect for human rights compared to its U.S. peers. In addition, Twitter's disclosure declined in a few key areas, as the company revealed less comprehensive information about government requests it received to remove or restrict content or accounts and its data retention policies.

Twitter, Inc. operates a global social media platform with products and services that allow users to create, share, and find content on the Twitter social network, and livestream videos on Periscope. Twitter also provides advertising services and developer tools.

Market cap: USD 26.5 billion³

NYSE: TWTR

Domicile: USA

Website: <https://twitter.com>

Governance 50%

Despite some improvements, Twitter had weak disclosure of its governance and oversight over human rights issues, scoring lower than most U.S. internet and mobile ecosystem companies in this category. While it disclosed that it regularly engages with a range of stakeholders on freedom of expression and privacy issues [G5], Twitter is not a member of a multi-stakeholder initiative like the Global Network Initiative [GNI], which sets standards for how ICT companies should respect users' human rights. The company clarified that it educates employees about its privacy policies and disclosed a whistleblower policy to

allow employees to submit privacy-related complaints, but not those related to freedom of expression [G3]. Twitter disclosed some information about conducting human rights risk assessments when launching new products or entering into new markets, but did not disclose whether it conducts risk assessments related to its use of automated decision-making or targeted advertising [G4]. Twitter's complaints mechanisms were stronger than Google's and Facebook's but it was less clear how users can submit grievances related to privacy [G6].

Freedom of Expression 60%

Although Twitter disclosed more than most of its peers about policies affecting users' freedom of expression—earning the second-best score in this category, behind Google—its overall score in this category declined slightly, and its disclosure fell short in a number of key areas.

Twitter earned the top score among its peers for clear disclosure of its rules and its processes for enforcing them (F3, F4, F8). It took a step forward by publishing a comprehensive Twitter Rules Enforcement report detailing what actions the company took to enforce its terms, but it was not clear if the company plans to publish this data on a regular basis, nor was the data available in a structured format [F4].⁴ It also earned a score improvement by

clarifying that when it restricts content or accounts for violating its rules, it will notify Twitter users attempting to access the restricted content of the reason for the restriction [F8].

Twitter also performed relatively well on its disclosure about how it handles government and private requests to restrict accounts, disclosing less than only Google and Verizon Media (F5-F7).⁵ It clarified its process for responding to court orders and committed to carry out due diligence on government requests to remove or restrict content or accounts, including by pushing back against inappropriate or overbroad requests [F5]. However, Twitter's data regarding content or account restriction requests no longer included as much information for Periscope [F6].

Privacy 55%

Twitter disclosed less about its privacy policies than most of its U.S. peers—including Microsoft, Apple, Google, and Verizon Media. It provided little information about its security policies, earning the second-lowest score on these indicators [P13-P18]. Like most companies, it failed to disclose any information about how it responds to data breaches [P15]. It lacked clear disclosure about its encryption practices [P16]. It also disclosed less than all of its U.S. peers, aside from Facebook, about steps it takes to help users keep their accounts secure [P17].

Twitter disclosed less than most of its U.S. peers about how it handles government and private requests to hand over user data [P10-P12]. It revealed some information about how it responds to government requests, but not private requests [P10]. Twitter tied with Facebook and Apple for disclosing the most data on third-party requests for user information it received and complied with [P11]. However, like other U.S. companies, it did

not divulge the exact number of requests received for user data under Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) requests or National Security Letters (NSLs), or the actions it took in response to these requests, since it is prohibited by law from doing so.⁶

On a positive note, Twitter earned the top score among internet and mobile ecosystem companies for disclosure of how it handles user information [P3-P9]. It disclosed clear information about what types of user data it collects and how [P3]. It clarified why it may track users across third party apps or websites [P9]. It also disclosed an option for Periscope users to download some of their data [P8]. Although it disclosed more than most companies about its data retention policies, Twitter was less transparent than in the previous year about if and when it deletes user information after users close their accounts [P6].

Footnotes

[1] The research period for the 2019 Index ran from January 13, 2018 to February 8, 2019. Policies that came into effect after February 8, 2019 were not evaluated in this Index.

[2] For Twitter's performance in the 2018 Index, see: rankingdigitalrights.org/index2018/companies/twitter

[3] Bloomberg Markets, Accessed April 18, 2019, www.bloomberg.com/quote/TWTR:US

[4] Twitter Rules Enforcement report, transparency.twitter.com/en/twitter-rules-enforcement.html

[5] Oath, which provides a range of communications services including Yahoo Mail and Tumblr, updated its name to Verizon Media on January 7, 2019. See: www.oath.com/2019/01/07/oath-is-now-verizon-media

[6] "USA FREEDOM Act of 2015," Pub. L. No. 114-23 [2015], www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/2048