International Institute of Communications

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REGULATORY WATCH

A round up of the latest news from the world of communications and media policy

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FCC announces new rules for 'space modernization'

The US Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is creating a new framework of space and spectrum regulation designed to achieve its avowed goal of US 'space superiority'. The new framework will replace legacy satellite and earth station rules and address issues of the commercial space economy, spectrum management, interference, national security and orbital debris. Application processing will be based on 'bright-line criteria presumed to be in the national interest' and requirements will be simplified. License terms for most space and earth stations will be increased to 20 years. At the same time the FCC has raised $3.57 billion from selling 200 licences in its AWS-3 auction and is expected to complete a further auction of C-band frequencies by July 2027. (Source, please [click here])

Most Australian teenagers are still on social media

More than 8 in 10 Australian teenagers continue to use social media three months after the ban on their use by under-16s came into force, according to new research from the country's eSafety commissioner. The study found that most 10 to 15 year olds were continuing to use social media just as frequently as they did before the ban came into force. The regulator attributes this to tech companies failing to implement effective age checks, noting that 'most under-16s who had social media accounts before commencement (of the ban) were able either to retain them or create new ones...' This is in spite of account ownership among the age group declining to 42 per cent from 52 per cent. Around half of the children who retained their accounts said that the platforms had not checked their age, while many said their accounts listed them as over 16. The Australian government defended the ban, with a minister claiming that it had 'already reshaped the national debate'. (Reuters)

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European companies race to label AI chatbots as new rules come into force

Chatbots, deepfakes and AI-generated marketing material will need to be labelled as new rules under the EU's AI Act come into force. In a 'cookie banner moment' the regulation requires companies to tell consumers when they are interacting with AI systems and to identify AI-generated images, audio and video. Companies argue that the EU is asking businesses to adopt AI more rapidly while simultaneously introducing regulation that is hard to interpret. The European Commission published guidelines on the new rules only weeks before they came into force, leaving companies with little time to adapt. Companies have also complained about an 'unnecessary layer of regulation' and warned of a definition of deepfakes that is too broad. (Financial Times)

African countries resist 'aid for data' deals with US

Countries including Ghana, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe have rejected deals with the United States in which aid is linked to the provision of healthcare data to US companies. A recent agreement the US signed with Kenya includes commitments to provide aid worth approximately $1.6 billion over five years. Supporters argue that the deal is vital to strengthening Kenya's ability to fight diseases such as HIV, malaria and tuberculosis. So far, 21 African countries have signed similar memorandums of understanding, but critics point out that the deals do not include access to any medical innovations resulting from the sharing of data, nor is there any data-sharing reciprocity. The deals are part of the 'America First Global Health Strategy' that, in the words of US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, are designed 'help promote and export American health innovation around the world' while 'saving millions of lives'. (African Business)

OpenAI launches ChatGPT for Teens

Amid increasing concerns about teenagers use of chatbots, OpenAI is rolling out its ChatGPT for Teens service, designed to help students think through problems rather than providing answers. The company claims that 9 out of 10 teenagers who use ChatGPT do so for learning and productivity. The teen version includes a 'study' mode which will help students come up with a thesis but won't write an essay, and which explains how to solve an equation rather than providing a solution. The platform will automatically place under-18s into the new experience using an age-prediction model that analyses 2,000 signals such as chat content and times of day. Parents can link their ChatGPT account with their teenagers and implement additional settings. The service also includes settings which prompt interventions when teenagers talk about safety related issues such as self-harm, eating disorders or violence. The move comes as Meta is being sued in the US – four states are seeking $1.4 trillion in damages over accusations that the company's platforms are contributing to a crisis in youth mental health. (Wall Street Journal)