

Translation



The following document announces a new crackdown on mobile apps by China's internet regulator. The announcement describes an app market rife with scams, pornography, and other undesirable phenomena, and puts the onus on Chinese app provider platforms to improve the situation.

Title

Office of the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission Arranges and Launches “Clear and Bright: Rectifying the Chaos in the Realm of Mobile Internet Application Programs” Special Campaign
中央网信办部署开展“清朗·移动互联网应用程序领域乱象整治”专项行动

Source

Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC; 国家互联网信息办公室; 国家网信办) website, December 12, 2022. CAC is effectively the same organization as the Office of the Central Cyberspace Commission (中央网络安全和信息化委员会办公室; 中央网信办), as they share the same personnel and the same offices.

The Chinese source text is available online at:

http://www.cac.gov.cn/2022-12/12/c_1672477187051942.htm

An archived version of the Chinese source text is available online at: <https://perma.cc/J73H-K3K9>

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Translator

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Office of the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission Arranges and Launches “Clear and Bright: Rectifying the Chaos in the Realm of Mobile Internet Application Programs” Special Campaign

The Office of the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission has launched the “Clear and Bright: Rectifying the Chaos in the Realm of Mobile Internet Application Programs” special campaign in order to regulate information services management for mobile internet application programs, to more thoroughly govern the chaos in application programs such as apps, applets, and fast apps,¹ to further concentrate the main responsibilities of application program distribution platforms, and to promote the healthy and orderly development of the industry.

¹ Translator's note: “Fast apps” (快应用) are a type of applet created by major Chinese mobile phone providers. Fast apps provide the same functionality to mobile phone users as regular apps, but need not be downloaded or installed.

I. Work Objectives

Implement and practice the spirit of the 20th Party Congress, persist in taking the people as the center (以人民为中心), strengthen management of the entire mobile internet application program chain, comprehensively regulate the operational behavior of the search, download, use, and other features of mobile application programs, focus on resolving prominent problems that harm users' legitimate rights and interests, thoroughly govern all types of chaotic phenomena, purify the online environment, and create a clear and bright cyberspace.

II. Main Tasks

According to the requirements of the *Administrative Regulations for Mobile Internet Application Program Information Services*, supervise and urge application program distribution platforms to carry out each task well, rectify existing problems at various levels, and promote the healthy and orderly development of the industry.

A. Search and lookup features

First, crack down hard on “knockoff (山寨) apps.” Severely crack down on all manner of counterfeit apps that use familiar logos, photos, and text to imitate real apps, thereby tricking users into accessing or downloading them, illegally collecting individuals' information, or disseminating malign (不良) or harmful information. Strictly investigate and handle all manner of applets that illegally collect prepayments from users, deceive consumers, or abscond with their money.

Second, strictly rectify phony rankings. Strictly punish application program providers that put up phony download numbers or positive reviews or induce user downloads for the sake of higher rankings or a better position among recommended [apps]. Resolutely crack down on application program distribution platforms that practice fraud and create false rankings or recommendations for application programs.

Third, comprehensively purify the appearance of web pages. Concentrate rectification on application programs that use malign information such as suggestive language, images of scantily clad or unclothed [people], or lurid captions that inflame the imagination to entice users to click or download. Comprehensively purge illegal and malign information such as vulgarity or soft pornography from the homepages or main screens of app stores and from important web page displays such as searches and recommendations.

Fourth, strictly regulate registration (备案) requirements. Crack down hard on unregistered [entities] that provide application program distribution services. Those who provide download services through methods such as browser links or QR codes must undergo registration as per the *Administrative Regulations for Mobile Internet Application Program Information Services*.

B. Download and installation features

First, concentrate rectification on coercive or bundled² downloads and installations. Place stress on constraining behaviors involving program application close or exit buttons that are out of order, or automatic downloads or installs that users did not agree to. Strictly crack down on behaviors such as default option settings that mislead users into clicking, downloading, or installing bundled software.

Second, firmly punish application programs that use “false advertising” (“挂羊头卖狗肉”) to evade oversight. Strictly deal with application program providers that sell one version but actually deliver a different version, or use embedded illegal software or illegitimate duplicate versions³ to engage in illegal behavior related to pornography, gambling, etc.

Third, strictly crack down on [apps] that use money-making opportunities as bait to lure users into downloading them. Focus enforcement efforts on application program distribution platforms that deliberately promote money-making application programs, “play”⁴ users, or monetize traffic for their own benefit. Firmly crack down on all manner of application programs that use money-making opportunities to trick users into downloading or using them and then place all sorts of impediments in users’ way.

C. Operation and use features

² Translator’s note: “Bundled” (捆绑) in this case refers to one or more software programs that are included with software that a user intends to install and use. When the user installs the desired software, the bundled programs are automatically installed as well, without the user’s knowledge or permission.

³ Translator's note: A "duplicate version" (马甲包) is an app or other software program that is designed to perform exactly the same as another, official app, the only difference between the two being minor changes to its icon or name. Some Chinese app developers market duplicate versions of their apps for various reasons, such as to circumvent app store limits on the number of search keywords that can be associated with a single app, or to effectively create backup versions, in case an upgrade to one version of the app causes it to malfunction.

⁴ Translator's note: In Chinese online slang, the word "to play" (套路) refers to someone who practices a pattern of behavior until it becomes instinctive, and then uses this routine whenever faced with a complex social situation. The word has a slightly derogatory flavor, as it is often used in the context of manipulating or "playing" other people, particularly online.

First, concentrate enforcement on the problem of pop-up windows. Comprehensively rectify all manner of problems with application programs with pop-up windows that are numerous and difficult to block. Focus rectification on web page pop-up windows with fake “close” boxes or buttons that jump around, or that use deceptive content to trick, mislead, or entice users into clicking or voluntarily jumping to a different link. Strictly rectify behaviors that infringe on the legal rights and interests of users, such as windows that pop up in rapid succession, or compulsory sharing (强制分享).

Second, strictly regulate the installation of functions (功能). Strictly deal with application programs that deliberately conceal relevant functions, such as installing transparent icons or not displaying downloads or operations in their logs. Strictly rectify application programs that engage in behavior that severely infringes on users’ rights and interests, such as obstructing installs or uninstalls or charging compulsory automatic repeating fees.

Third, strictly crack down on induced recharges. Firmly crack down on some application programs that deliberately induce users to pay fees, such as through phony free trials, giveaways, or chat with the opposite sex. Strictly punish application programs that entice minors into spending money on recharges.

III. Work Requirements

- A. **Push these arrangements solidly forward.** Clarify objectives and tasks, implementation procedures, and concrete measures. Start by strengthening regulation and administration of distribution platforms. Comprehensively clear up and rectify prominent problems.
- B. **Keep a firm grip on key platforms.** Increase the intensity of rectification at application program distribution platforms with prominent problems, especially in important areas concentrated on distribution platforms. We must adopt more targeted measures, and be relentless in carrying out our work.
- C. **Increase the power of propaganda.** Adopt various forms, strengthen propaganda channeling of public opinion, enhance notifications of typical examples, effectively achieve social consensus, and mobilize broad participation by all sectors of society.
- D. **Strengthen enforcement of laws and regulations.** Combine special campaigns (专项行动), solidly carry out mobile internet application program administration

work, and urge application program distribution platforms to earnestly carry out their main responsibilities by strengthening policy guidance.