

Reports on March actions - Fighting COVID-19 Disinformation Monitoring Programme

Platform signatories of the Code of Practice on Disinformation are putting in place further actions to limit the spread of COVID-19 disinformation by providing users with tools to better evaluate the content they see on their services.

The reports published today focus on actions taken to limit COVID-19 and vaccines disinformation by the platforms in March 2021. The reports are delivered in the context of the COVID-19 disinformation monitoring programme set up under the 10 June 2020 Joint Communication.

Overall, Commission services acknowledge the platforms' efforts in providing more details on the measures put in place to limit COVID-19 disinformation. They note however, as in previous months, that more granular and precise data would be needed on the application of the measures at Member State level to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the measures' effectiveness across the EU.

Fighting COVID-19 vaccines disinformation

False and inaccurate information about vaccines and vaccinations keeps appearing online while the vaccination campaign is gaining momentum across Europe. The reports provide information about the measures taken by platform signatories of the Code of Practice to fight disinformation on COVID-19 vaccines in March 2021.

Platforms report on their updated policies, which include expanding the lists of false claims - whose violation may result in removals - , including more vaccine-related claims, and adding warning labels on content containing unsubstantiated rumours or disputed claims. Platforms also report on cooperation with local governments and health authorities, and they have refined the metrics they report on to provide more contextual information and details on the effectiveness of certain measures.

In particular:

- **Twitter** updated its policies on misleading information about COVID-19 vaccines. From March 1, it will label or place a warning on Tweets that advance unsubstantiated rumours, disputed claims, as well as incomplete or out-of-context information about vaccines. Moreover, in partnership with the French government, Twitter run a pro bono Promoted Trend, a feature promoting sponsored content alongside trending topics, on vaccine adoption to support the vaccination campaign in France. The Promoted Trend received 13.8 million impressions and 54K users clicked through.
- **TikTok** reports it has significantly expanded the "Know your Facts" tool to six markets in the EU (Spain, Germany, Austria, France, Italy and the Netherlands). The tool invites users to pause before they share unsubstantiated content. On quantitative data, the vaccine tag attached to all videos with words or hashtags related to COVID-19 vaccines has been applied to 7687 videos in

the EU, more than double the month before. Of those videos, TikTok reports a significant increase in the number of video tagged across the biggest markets (2073 in France, 1108 in Germany and 349 in Spain), particularly in Italy, where the number of videos tagged (1967) is more than the triple of the month before. Also, there has been a significant increase of interactions with the COVID vaccine tag across all markets in the EU.

- **Google** is working with public health authorities and other authoritative sources to show information about the vaccination campaign by location, as this becomes available, on Google Search and Maps. In Europe, this feature is currently available in France as of early April, with more countries forthcoming. On YouTube, since expanding the COVID-19 misinformation policy to include vaccine-related claims in October 2020, 30.000 videos have been removed that included claims about COVID-19 vaccination that contradict consensus among health authorities.
- **Microsoft** has expanded information on vaccines and vaccination on LinkedIn's page on COVID-19, where users are directed when searching COVID-19-related terms. Moreover, through the "VaxFacts" campaign, "HealthGuard", a browser extension that helps users identify trustworthy sources of health news and information when browsing, is now free to use until 30 June.
- **Facebook** reports that they expanded their tools in March to help people getting vaccinated against COVID-19 by adding labels on posts about COVID-19 vaccines to show additional information from the WHO and making available real-time aggregate trends regarding the progress in COVID-19 vaccinations. Facebook also reports that after their list of false claims violations has been extended, the number of pieces of content removed worldwide due to the violation of their terms of service - which was previously subject to warning screens - has increased by 2 million.

Further reporting for March

The reports provide further information illustrating actions taken to fight COVID-19 related disinformation and the impact of these actions through March 2021. Some examples from the reports:

- **TikTok** reports expanding its network of factcheckers to cover also Dutch and German languages. Looking at the data on interactions with the COVID notice tag, the report notes that the click-through-rate (CTR) of the tag has grown through the markets reported, while impressions and clicks have decreased everywhere except Germany. Italy experiences the opposite trend, with an increase in clicks and impressions, but a decrease in CTR.
- **Twitter** reports that in March, the COVID-19 explore tab was refreshed with three new features to further help people find accurate and reliable information around COVID-19: Public Service Announcements Carousel, Topics and Lists. Also, in March 2021, 945 Promoted Tweets in violation of our COVID-19 advertising policy and been halted and removed.
- **Google** reported that Google contributed €25 million to help launch the "European Media & Information Fund" to strengthen media literacy skills, support independent fact-checking and combat misinformation. The Fund is managed by the European University Institute, the European Digital Media Observatory and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, with Google exempt from all decision making. Moreover, 11 projects were selected for the COVID-19 Vaccine Counter-Misinformation Open Fund announced in January; two of those are European.
- **Microsoft** reports that in March 2021, Bing COVID experience sees an increase in the number of visitors from February to 14.889.204 (+ 165.831), including 2.642.149 (+ 286.076) from EU countries. Moreover, Microsoft reports its services have taken steps to alert users when they might be interacting with disinformation.
- **Facebook** reports that 15 million people in the EU visited Facebook's COVID-19 Information Center during the month of March 2021. The **Instagram** COVID-19 Information Center has been

launched in March, in the EU it is currently available in France and Germany. Moreover, in March, over 52 thousand pieces of content have been removed in the EU on Facebook and Instagram in implementation of the COVID-19 Misinformation and Harm policy for containing misinformation that may lead to imminent physical harm.

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The Commission has published the first set of reports provided by the online platform signatories of the Code of Practice as part of the COVID-19 monitoring and reporting programme set out in the Communication “Tackling COVID-19 disinformation - Getting the facts right”.

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