

YouTube tries to crack down on conspiracy videos

March 14 2018, by Barbara Ortutay



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YouTube says it's cracking down on conspiracy videos, though it's scant on the details.

Conspiracy videos abound on YouTube, whether it's about the Earth being flat or [school shootings](#) being staged. YouTube, its parent Google, Facebook and Twitter are all facing challenges with the spread of misinformation, propaganda and [fake news](#).

YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki said at a conference Tuesday that the company will include links to the online encyclopedia Wikipedia to try to debunk videos espousing [conspiracy theories](#).

But Wikipedia itself has had its share of credibility issues, as the service lets anyone edit its content, whether that person is a pedigreed expert or an online troll. Though Wikipedia has tried to address that—in part by restricting edits on high-profile or controversial pages—it isn't immune from hoaxes and its own conspiracy theories.

In a statement Wednesday, YouTube said the links will include other "third-party sources" besides Wikipedia, though YouTube isn't identifying any. The organization that runs Wikipedia said Wednesday that it had no formal partnership with YouTube, but welcomed the use of Wikipedia resources.

YouTube said the move is part of a broader initiative to crack down on misinformation, though it did not give details on what else is in the works.

While conspiracy videos are nothing new on YouTube, the topic received renewed attention in recent weeks as videos falsely claimed that students speaking out about the Feb. 14 Florida school shooting, which killed 17 people, were "crisis actors" who were not really there when it happened. One such [conspiracy video](#) was the top trending video on YouTube until the company removed it—although many similar videos remained up, illustrating the difficulty in instituting any sort of crackdown.

Conspiracy videos, to be sure, are not against YouTube's policies. In the "crisis actor" case, the company said it removed the video because it violated its rules against harassment. As such, YouTube is unlikely to ban misinformation entirely. Instead, it may adopt Facebook's tactic of de-emphasizing such content and making it less likely to be seen. As it stands, critics say YouTube is doing the opposite.

"What keeps people glued to YouTube? Its algorithm seems to have concluded that people are drawn to content that is more extreme than what they started with—or to incendiary content in general," Zeynep Tufekci, a University of North Carolina professor who studies the social impact of technology, wrote in a recent New York Times essay. Tufekci said that as users click through video after video, excited by "uncovering more secrets and deeper truths," YouTube leads us down "a rabbit hole of extremism, while Google racks up the ad sales."

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Citation: YouTube tries to crack down on conspiracy videos (2018, March 14) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-03-youtube-conspiracy-videos.html>

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