EU & COVID-19 Disinformation Google Report, December 2020

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, teams across Google have launched over 200 new products, features and initiatives and are contributing over $1 billion in resources to help our users, clients, partners, and governments through this unprecedented time. Our major efforts are focused around: providing trusted information to our users, helping people adapt to a changing world, and contributing to recovery efforts across the globe. This report, drafted at the request of the EU Commission, expands upon the aspects of this work that pertain to providing trusted information.

The EU Code of Practice on Disinformation was published on September 26 2018, in line with a goal set by the European Commission's April 26 2018 Communication: "Tackling online disinformation: a European Approach". Signatories (including Google) provided their formal subscriptions to the Code in October 2018, and committed to reporting on their progress on an annual basis.

Google's first annual self-assessment was published by the EU Commission alongside with those of other signatories on October 29, 2019. Since then, Google has engaged with a number of organizations supporting the European Commission as part of its assessment of this first series of annual reports, and we are preparing for our 2020 annual report to be filed in October 2020.

In addition, at the behest of the EU Commission's December 5 2018 Action Plan against Disinformation, we went beyond the scope of our annual reporting commitment and published monthly updates on our implementation of Code of Practice provisions ahead of the 2019 EU Parliamentary elections. In that capacity, we published one baseline report and five monthly updates between January and June 2019.

Similarly, on June 10th 2020, the EU Commission published a communication asking that Code of Practice signatories provide *"monthly reports on their policies and actions to address COVID-19 related disinformation"*.

This request is one step removed from the reporting commitments that Google and other Code signatories agreed upon in September 2018. Yet, we fully acknowledge the Commission's concerns with regards to addressing this important issue. Over the first half of 2020, Google and YouTube's product, engineering, and trust-and-safety teams have worked around the clock to ensure that our services provide users with trustworthy information about the pandemic and that we empower them to make informed decisions about their health and that of their loved ones. We understand and welcome the Commission's attention to our and other platforms' work to that end, and will engage with this new monthly reporting process as long as necessary.

As such, this report represents Google's second monthly report in response to the request outlined by the Commission's June 10th communication. It builds upon our first report (published on September 10 on the European Commission's website) and covers measures taken by Google and YouTube towards responding to COVID-19 related disinformation, organized along the categories set out by the Commission's communication:

1. Initiatives to **promote authoritative content**;
2. Initiatives and tools to **improve users' awareness**;
3. Reporting on **social media manipulation and malign influence operations or coordinated inauthentic behaviour** detected on their services;
4. Policies on **advertising linked to COVID-19 disinformation**.

We appreciate that the Commission's communication was drafted with many different services in mind, and that because these services are different, they have different degrees of exposure and methods to tackle disinformation. As such, in places where the letter of the Commission's

communication does not strictly apply to our products and services, we will report on the closest equivalents available to us.

Because we did not radically alter our approach to coronavirus response since our last report, this iteration largely borrows from the substance of our prior reports – with updated metrics covering November 2020, and the addition of new information about our products or policies in EU Member States where relevant.

Addressing COVID-19 Vaccine misinformation and disinformation
As the European Commission and others around the world turn their attention to prepare for mis- and disinformation that may be related to COVID-19 vaccination, so do we across our products and services.

In many cases, this will not mean direct changes to our product or policy responses. This is by design: most of the work that we do to take action against content that contradicts health authorities is equally pertinent to fighting misinformation about COVID-19 vaccination as it is to fighting misinformation about the pandemic writ-large.

That being said, there will be new efforts that we undertake specifically to further clarify or elaborate upon our responses when it comes to addressing the potential for coronavirus vaccine mis- and disinformation – for instance, policy updates, new outreach, or new features and information panels.

We will include such new vaccine-specific efforts directly in the body of our report, as well as in this dedicated section per the Commission's request. That said, we want to be clear that these efforts do not represent the integrality of our work that is relevant to addressing COVID-19 vaccine misinformation and disinformation – only the subset of our work that are specific to that threat.

November 2020 updates:

- On October 14, we have further expanded YouTube's COVID-19 medical misinformation policy to include a set of claims relating to a potential vaccine that contradict expert consensus from local health authorities or the World Health Organization (WHO). This includes, for instance, claims that the COVID-19 vaccines will kill people who receive it; or claims that the flu vaccine protects against COVID-19. Such claims would also be prohibited under our Dangerous and Derogatory content policies in Google Ads and AdSense, or in Search features that are covered by our Medical Topics policy.
- We will continue to work with the World Health Organization and European health authorities to monitor emerging misinformation relating to vaccines that may result in real-world harm and, as we have done since the beginning of the pandemic, will update our policies, features, and information panels accordingly.

December 2020 updates:

- Since the beginning of the pandemic, we've given $250 million in Ad Grants globally to help more than 100 government agencies run critical public service announcements about COVID-19. Grantees will now be able to use these funds throughout 2021, including for vaccine education and outreach campaigns.
- Beginning in the United Kingdom, we're launching a new feature on Search so when people look up information for COVID-19 vaccines, we will surface a list of authorized vaccines in their location, as well as information panels on each individual vaccine. As other health authorities begin authorizing vaccines, we'll introduce this new feature in more countries.
- On YouTube, with countries approving vaccines and beginning to enact their vaccination plans, we are working to add authoritative vaccination information from local health authorities to these info panels as it is made available to the public.

- As of December 2020, the Google News Initiative is providing an additional $1.5 million to fund the creation of a COVID-19 Vaccine Media Hub and support new fact-checking research.
    - Led by the Australian Science Media Centre, and with support from technology non-profit Meedan, the hub will be a resource for journalists, providing around-the-clock access to scientific expertise and research updates. The initiative includes science media centers and public health experts from Latin America, Africa, Europe, North America and the Asia-Pacific region, with content being made available in seven languages.
    - To better understand what type of fact-checking can effectively counteract misinformation about vaccines, we're funding research by academics at Columbia, George Washington and Ohio State universities. This research project will survey citizens in ten countries to find out what kinds of formats, headlines and sources are most effective in correcting COVID-19 vaccine misinformation and whether fact checks that follow these best practices impact willingness to get vaccinated.
- We have published a blog post to outline these updates to the public and contextualize them in the framework of our broader efforts to address COVID-19 mis and disinformation – https://blog.google/technology/health/accurate-timely-information-covid-19-vaccines

1. Initiatives to promote authoritative content

Information requested by the EU Commission
"Platforms should provide data on the actions taken to promote information from national and international health agencies, national and EU authorities, as well as professional media, including information on the use of trustworthiness indicators for news sources.

Data should be broken down by Member State and include where relevant in view of the specificities of their services:

- Identification of the sources promoted at EU and national level
- Volume of free advertising offered to health agencies and public authorities
- Relevant output indicators to assess the impact of such initiatives (e.g. audience engagement data, including number of followers, views and shares) in each Member State."

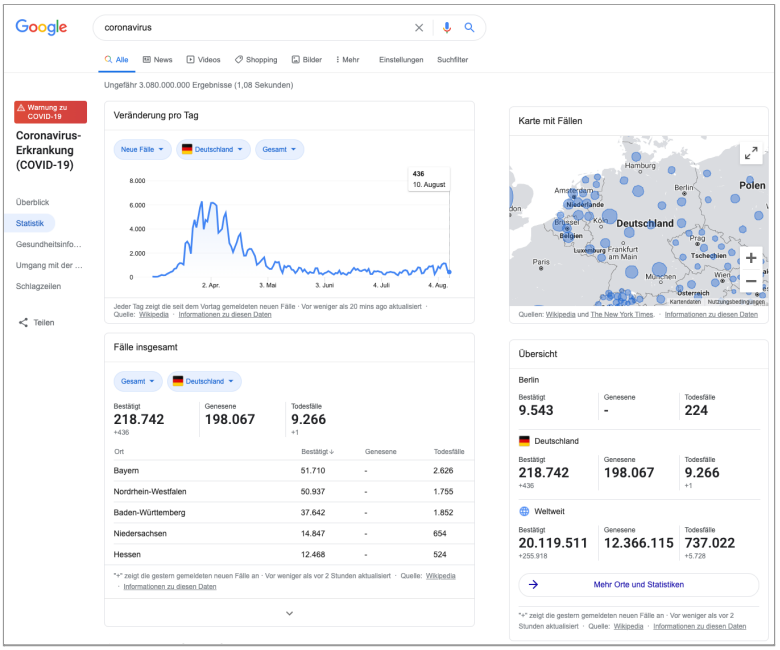
Since the beginning of the year, search interest in COVID-19 has grown in Europe and around the world. In response, we have worked to help people find the information they need across Google and YouTube – including by partnering with health organizations and governments to bring our users authoritative information in a rapidly changing environment.

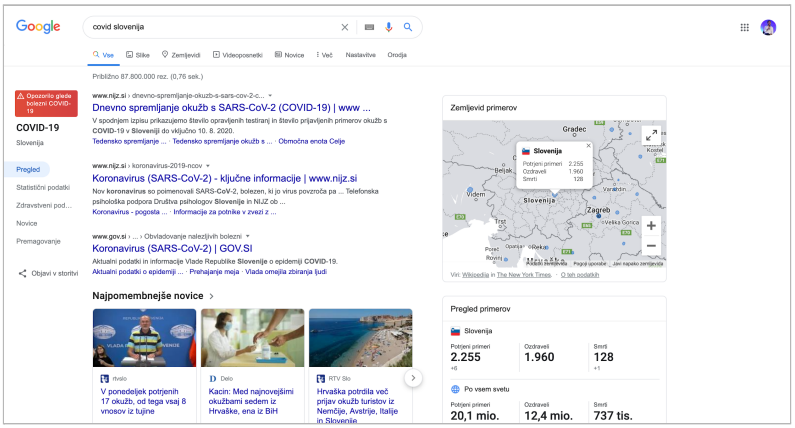
Our teams across the EU are working closely with government authorities and public health institutions to surface content from authoritative sources in local languages.

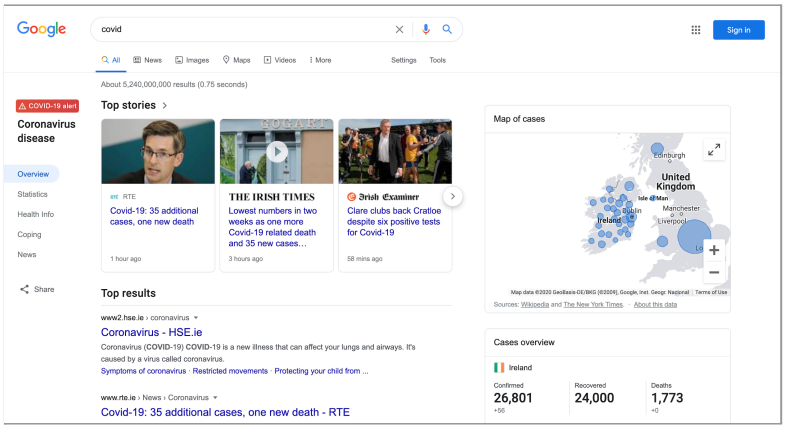
Over the course of this section, we will provide an overview of the initiatives, policies, and product efforts we have undertaken to those ends. **Unless specified otherwise, the content of this section applies equally to all EU Member States[1].**

- In **Search**, we have introduced a comprehensive experience for COVID-19 that provides easy access to information from health authorities alongside new data and visualizations. This new format organizes the search results page to help people easily navigate resources and makes it possible to add more information as it becomes available over time. This experience comes as a complement to pre-existing work on Google Search and Google News to recognize sensitive events and contexts, and our systems are designed to elevate authoritative sources for those classes of queries. In December, we announced that beginning in the United Kingdom, we're launching a new feature on Search so when people look up information for COVID-19 vaccines, we will surface a list of authorized vaccines in their location, as well as information panels on each individual vaccine. As other health authorities begin authorizing vaccines, we'll introduce this new feature in more countries – including EU member States.

[1] This section does not cover the volume of free advertising offered to health agencies and public authorities – that information has been moved to section 4, where we also address our broader efforts as they relate to advertising.





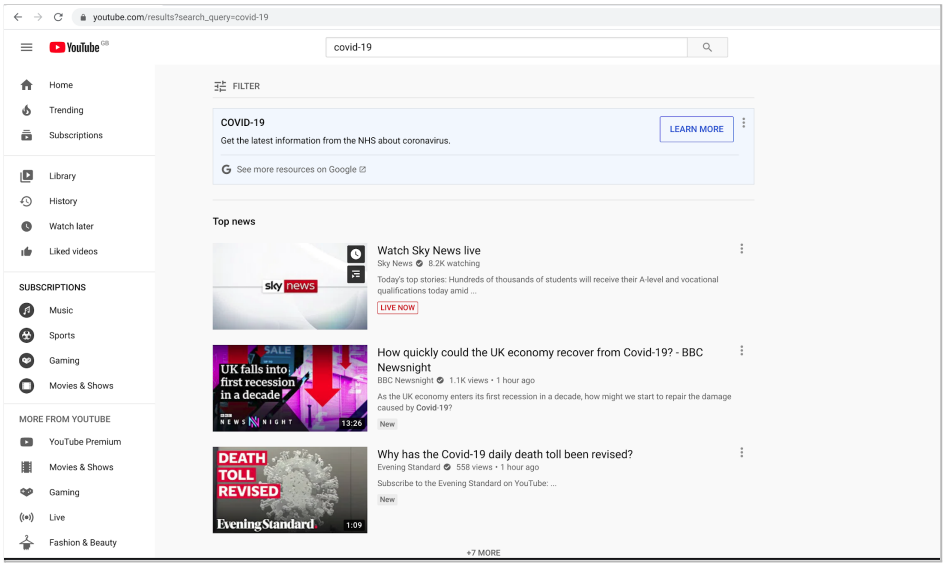


Components of our Coronavirus Search experience as available in Germany, Slovenia, and Ireland – respectively

- On the **Google HomePage**, in partnership with the World Health Organization and other health authorities, including those from the EU member states, we have promoted important guidance to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The efforts, including prevention tips and

messaging on our homepage, have launched in more than 100 countries to date, including all EU member states.

- Across **YouTube**, we are elevating authoritative sources such as the WHO and local authorities to help users get the latest COVID-19 information. We display information panels linking to global and locally relevant health officials on our homepage, and in panels that appear on videos and searches about COVID-19. With countries approving vaccines and countries enacting their vaccination plans, we are adding authoritative vaccination information from local health authorities to these info panels, as it is made available to the public. Collectively, our panels have served over 400 billion impressions around the world. We have also donated ad inventory to governments and NGOs to help give their public health messages about COVID-19 more visibility on YouTube. In addition, YouTube elevates content from authoritative channels such as news organizations or health authorities when our systems detect that a user's search is health-related. Finally, to engage the vibrant YouTube community and to support global leaders in their urging people to stay home and help flatten the curve of COVID-19, in March, YouTube partnered with creators around the world to launch our #StayHome #WithMe campaign. YouTube engaged hundreds of creators and influencers across the globe to film public service announcements to get young people to stay home and work out, study, learn, craft, and listen to music with their favorite YouTube creators virtually. In the EU, we worked with popular creators like Norman fait des vidéos (France) and Paula Gonu (Spain) to create and publish compilation videos emphasizing the important stay home message.



YouTube Search results page in Germany, featuring a COVID-19 information panel and news sources in the Top News shelf

- In **Google News**, we have created a new COVID-19 section with links to up-to-date, relevant stories from the international to local levels from a variety of authoritative sources. The section is now available to users across 40 top impacted markets (including the following EU member States: Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Netherlands, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Sweden) and puts local news front and center by highlighting stories about the virus from local publishers in the reader's area.

- We continue to **elevate the work of fact-checkers in Google Search, Google News, and Google Images** by signalling fact-check articles in our results via dedicated tags and "rich snippets" that make it easy for users to understand at a glance what is being fact-checked and what the fact-checker's assessment is. In order to benefit from these features, fact-checkers (EU-based or otherwise) need only to start signalling their fact-checks using an open-source HTML code; to meet guidelines relating to accountability, transparency, and readability; and to be ranked highly enough by our systems. While this effort began before the COVID-19 pandemic, we have observed that many fact-checkers have elected to focus on health misinformation over the course of the pandemic. It is possible to explore the fact-checks that we index by visiting https://toolbox.google.com/factcheck/explorer. Overall, fact checks published by fact-checking organizations from EU27 Member States appear in Google Search about 6m times a week on average, which adds up to more than 300m impressions from January 1st to November 25th 2020.

- On **Google Maps**, we are making it easier to find authoritative information about local health resources, including COVID-19 testing sites, shelters, general mask availability, food banks and virtual healthcare options where available. We're also using authoritative data sources to power a new tool that lets you see up to date information on how many new COVID-19 cases have been detected in an area and whether these cases are on the rise or decline. In addition, Maps displays updated information about whether local businesses are open during COVID-19 or are offering limited services like take out or deliver but closed for dine-in. ,We're also providing businesses with new ways to update their listing information to include important health and safety information front and center on their business profile.

- On **Google Play**, we prioritize the review and publication of policy-compliant apps published, commissioned or authorized by official government entities and public health organizations. Authorized COVID-19 apps must comply with all Play Developer policies, including User Data, Permissions, and Malicious Behavior. We also launched a "stay informed" page in the Play Store with apps that can help users stay informed and prepared during the crisis, using authoritative sources such as the WHO app. Play is also prioritizing a speedy review and approval of Exposure Notification apps – we refer interested governmental public health entities to apply via the publicly available intake form.

- A **website**, which provides resources dedicated to COVID-19 education and prevention, has also been released. It is available on www.google.com/COVID-19 in more than fifty countries. It is currently available in France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and Spain.

- We have provided **$250M in ad grants** to help the World Health Organization and more than 100 global government agencies provide critical information on how to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other relief measures to local communities - including $50M In ad grants to the EU governments and public authorities. In December 2020, we announced the extension of this program until the end of 2021. As of November 2020, EU governments and authorities have generated 333m impressions and 57M clicks, providing important health information across the EU. In addition, we've given a total of $188m to EU-based nonprofits from Jan - Nov, many of which are serving populations in increased need due to the crisis, leading to 1.6B impressions and 229M clicks.

2. Initiatives to improve user awareness

Information requested by the EU Commission
Platforms should provide data about implementation of their policies to inform users when they interact with disinformation.

Data should be broken down by Member State and include where relevant in view of the specificities of their services:

- Number of fact-checking organisations referenced in their services, for the purposes of issuing warning or labelling information tested as false or misleading;
- Measures taken to ensure due and expedite prominence to fact-checks and EU languages covered;
- Users' engagement data relating to pieces of content labelled as fact-checked and Demoted Measures taken to avoid resurgence of fact-checked disinformation which was removed due to its potential to harm citizens' health or public safety in violation of relevant community standards;
- Data showing the impact of such policies on users' behaviour

Detecting and removing COVID-19 misinformation
In addition to elevating authoritative information, we take active steps to detect and remove COVID-19 related misinformation that contradicts guidance from health authorities and may result in real-world harm. These steps are distinct to our efforts to provide context to users as they may be exposed to misinformation, which have already been outlined in part 1 of this report (e.g. information panels on Google Search and YouTube; fact-checking).

As per section 1 of this report **unless specified otherwise, the content of this section applies equally to all European countries.**

- On **YouTube**, our Community Guidelines prohibit content that encourages dangerous or illegal activities that risk serious physical harm or death, including certain types of medical misinformation. As the COVID-19 situation has evolved, we have partnered closely with global and local health authorities to ensure our policy definition and enforcement is effective in removing violative content where there is a serious risk of egregious harm. This work has evolved into a comprehensive COVID-19 medical misinformation policy, which prohibits, for example, content that denies the existence of the coronavirus or encourages the use of home remedies in place of medical treatment. We also prohibit content that explicitly disputes the efficacy of global or local health authority advice regarding social distancing that may lead people to act against that guidance. On October 14, we further expanded this policy to include a set of claims relating to a potential vaccine that contradict expert consensus from local health authorities or the World Health Organization (WHO). For example, we will remove content with claims that the COVID-19 vaccine will kill people who receive it. In addition, in 2019, we began work to reduce recommendations of borderline content—content that comes close to violating our policies but doesn't cross the line—such as certain types of potentially harmful misinformation. We continue to expand this work around the world.

- On **Google Search**, our medical topics policy applies to information we've highlighted via our COVID-related Search features. We strive to show information that reflects scientific consensus and evidence-based best practices, since we consider this content high quality. To this end, if this highlighted information runs contrary to general scientific consensus, we reserve the right to correct or remove the information from the feature.

- On **Google Play**, our policies prohibit developers from capitalizing on sensitive events. Our long-standing content policies strictly prohibit apps that feature health-related content or functionalities that are misleading or potentially harmful, including about COVID-19. Apps that violate these policies will be removed.

- On **Maps**, our policies prohibit misinformation about prevention, transmission and treatment services, as well as allegations that an individual contracted COVID-19 at a particular location. These types of contributed content will be removed.

Improving user awareness beyond the scope of our platforms
Helping the world make sense of information during a health crisis requires a broad-based response, involving scientists, journalists, public figures, technology platforms and many others. As such, we will also outline in this section our initiatives to support user awareness beyond direct interactions with our services, e.g. via partnerships with or support for relevant third party organizations. Those include:

- Supporting coronavirus fact-checking and verification efforts through more than $6.5 million in funding from the Google News Initiative to fact-checkers and nonprofits fighting misinformation around the world, with an immediate concentration on COVID-19, to several organizations including Correctiv, Maldita.es, Full Fact, First Draft and Science Feedback in Europe. In addition, we're working to increase access to data, scientific expertise and fact checks through support for collaborative databases and providing insights to fact-checkers, reporters and health authorities including sharing localized data from Google Trends on COVID-19 down to the city level.

- As of December 2020, the Google News Initiative is providing an additional $1.5 million to fund the creation of a COVID-19 Vaccine Media Hub and support new fact-checking research.
    - Led by the Australian Science Media Centre, and with support from technology non-profit Meedan, the hub will be a resource for journalists, providing around-the-clock access to scientific expertise and research updates. The initiative includes science media centers and public health experts from Latin America, Africa, Europe, North America and the Asia-Pacific region, with content being made available in seven languages.
    - To better understand what type of fact-checking can effectively counteract misinformation about vaccines, we're funding research by academics at Columbia, George Washington and Ohio State universities. This research project will survey citizens in ten countries to find out what kinds of formats, headlines and sources are most effective in correcting COVID-19 vaccine misinformation and whether fact checks that follow these best practices impact willingness to get vaccinated.

- Our established News Lab training for journalists has continued, our free workshops are being facilitated live in Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Polish, Portuguese and Spanish. As of December 2020, 15k Europeans have taken part in live sessions covering

digital verification and data journalism skills since the start of the pandemic.

- Stanford University's Big Local News and Pitch Interactive, with support from the Google News Initiative, have launched the COVID-19 Global Case Mapper, which makes it possible for journalists anywhere in the world to embed up-to-date visualizations of the pandemic on their sites for readers.

- Google launched a global Journalism Emergency Relief Fund through the Google News Initiative to support small and medium-sized news organizations producing original news for local communities. In EMEA, we have provided funding to 1,550+ recipients from a global total of 5,300.

- In addition, we have partnered with or supported (via grants from our foundation Google.org) the work of third party organizations that promote media literacy and improve user awareness in the EU countries where we operate, including,:

    - In the **Czech Republic**, Google launched a localized version of Interland, a free online game that helps educate children on online safety. The launch was welcomed by the Head of Cybersecurity Unit of the Czech Police, who highlighted its importance particularly in the context of the covid-19 pandemic and the related increase in the amount of time children spend online.

    - In **France**, two Google.org grantees - Generation Numerique and Observatoire pour la Parentalité et l'Éducation au Numérique - have provided their trainings to debunk fake news and conspiracy theories, through online program Google Ateliers Numériques - for example here.

    - In **Spain**, Google and the Prime Minister launched the media literacy program for teens *Infórmate* focused on critical thinking as a vaccine against fake news, what has been highlighted by H.M. the Queen during the quarantine for its importance against the challenging online content related to COVID.

    - In **Germany**, Google.org funded "Weitklick", a media literacy project which focuses on information literacy and misinformation. The project aims to engage with secondary and vocational teachers to help them address misinformation online and its impact on democratic societies in the classroom with a blended learning concept that includes an online platform and digital tools in self-learning courses and modules, online webinar sessions, and offline trainings. To achieve a nationwide implementation the project will work with Ministries of Education to certify the project's resources along states' curricula; and it will work closely with journalists and priority newsrooms on the development and implementation of teaching and learning resources.

3. Reporting on social media manipulation and malign influence operations

Information requested by the European Commission
"Platforms should report all instances of social media manipulation and malign influence operations or coordinated inauthentic behaviour detected on their services.

Data should be broken down by Member State and include where relevant in view of the specificities of their services :

- Information on the nature of the manipulative techniques used to amplify the reach of disinformation narratives (e.g. fake accounts, fake engagements, bots, coordinated interactions, role of influencers, hack-and-licks operations)
- Dimension of the networks involved (e.g. number of blocked pages, accounts or groups)
- Geographic origin of the pages, accounts or groups involved
- Languages used and the narratives concerned
- Target audiences, namely in the EU
- Impact of relevant information operations (e.g. number of followers, views, shares).

When we find attempts to conduct coordinated influence operations on our platforms anywhere around the world, we swiftly take action by removing content from our services and terminating these actors' accounts, in accordance with our policies. In addition, we take steps to prevent possible future attempts by the same actors, and routinely exchange information and share our findings with others in the industry.

We typically see less such violative activity on our services than other platforms, due in large part to the nature of our services and the fact that they do not enable direct user-to-user sharing. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the importance of informing policy makers, researchers, journalists, and the public on the nature of the attacks we see across our services, so as to help inform whole-of-society responses to disinformation.

There are well-known trade-offs to engaging in such disclosures. They include the risk of disclosing so much information that we'd enable malicious actors to better circumvent our defenses, or the risk of unwittingly calling more attention to influence operations than their scale or effectiveness would warrant (thus furthering the harms that they may cause). Finally, not every instance of manipulation of our platforms is worth reporting: in many ways, one could think of the spammers that have sought to circumvent our ranking systems since the early days of Google as engaging in platform *"manipulation"* – and while we do report on actions we take against spam in our annual webspam reports[2], it is a different kind of threat.

[2] https://webmasters.googleblog.com/2020/06/how-we-fought-search-spam-on-google.html

Bearing all these considerations in mind, in May 2020, we have introduced a new, quarterly bulletin published by Google's Threat Analysis Group, to share information about actions we take against accounts that we attribute to coordinated influence operations (foreign and domestic). Our actions against coordinated influence operations from January through June 2020 can be found in our Q1, Q2 and Q3 bulletins, which we have replicated in this section. This bulletin is global in scope, and will include any action we take that'd relate to an European member state.

Threat Analysis Group Coordinated Influence Operations Bulletin – Q1 2020

This bulletin includes coordinated influence operation campaigns terminated on our platforms in January, February and March of 2020. It was last updated on May 27, 2020.

January

- We terminated 3 YouTube channels as part of our ongoing investigation into coordinated influence operations linked to Iran. The campaign was linked to the Iranian state-sponsored International Union of Virtual Media (IUVM) network, and was reproducing IUVM content covering Iran's strikes into Iraq and U.S. policy on oil. We received leads from Graphika that supported us in this investigation.

February

- We terminated 1 advertising account and 82 YouTube channels as part of our actions against a coordinated influence operation linked to Egypt. The campaign was sharing political content in Arabic supportive of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, and Bahrain and critical of Iran and Qatar. We found evidence of this campaign being tied to the digital marketing firm New Waves based in Cairo. This campaign was consistent with similar findings reported by Facebook.

March

- We terminated 3 advertising accounts, 1 AdSense account, and 11 YouTube channels as part of our actions against a coordinated influence operation linked to India. The campaign was sharing messages in English supportive of Qatar. This campaign was consistent with similar findings reported by Facebook.
- We banned 1 Play developer and terminated 68 YouTube channels as part of our actions against a coordinated influence operation. The campaign was posting political content in Arabic supportive of Turkey and critical of the UAE and Yemen. This campaign was consistent with similar findings reported by Twitter.
- We terminated 1 advertising account, 1 AdSense account, 17 YouTube channels and banned 1 Play developer as part of our actions against a coordinated influence operation linked to Egypt. The campaign was posting political content in Arabic supportive of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, and Bahrain and critical of Iran and Qatar. This campaign was consistent with similar findings reported by Twitter.
- We banned 1 Play developer and terminated 78 YouTube channels as part of our actions against a coordinated influence operation linked to Serbia. The domestic campaign was posting pro-Serbian political content. This campaign was consistent with similar findings reported by Twitter.
- We terminated 18 YouTube channels as part of our continued investigation into a coordinated influence operation linked to Indonesia. The domestic campaign was targeting the Indonesian provinces Papua and West Papua with messaging in opposition to the Free Papua Movement. This campaign was consistent with similar findings reported by Twitter.

Threat Analysis Group Coordinated Influence Operations Bulletin – Q2 2020

This bulletin includes coordinated influence operation campaigns terminated on our platforms in April, May and June of 2020. It was last updated on August 5, 2020.

April

- We terminated 16 YouTube channels, 1 advertising account and 1 AdSense account as part of our ongoing investigation into coordinated influence operations linked to Iran. The campaign was linked to the Iranian state-sponsored International Union of Virtual Media (IUVM) network, and posted content in Arabic related to the U.S. response to COVID-19 and content about Saudi-American relations. We received leads from FireEye and Graphika that supported us in this investigation.
- We terminated 15 YouTube channels and 3 blogs as part of our ongoing investigation into coordinated influence operations linked to Russia. The campaign posted content in English and Russian about the EU, Lithuania, Ukraine, and the U.S., similar to the findings in a recent Graphika report called Secondary Infektion. We received leads from Graphika that supported us in this investigation.
- We terminated 7 YouTube channels as part of our ongoing investigation into coordinated influence operations linked to Russia. The campaign posted content in Russian, German, and Farsi about Russian and Syrian politics and the U.S. response to COVID-19. This campaign was consistent with similar findings reported by Facebook.
- We terminated 186 YouTube channels as part of our ongoing investigation into coordinated influence operations linked to China. These channels mostly uploaded spammy, non-political content, but a small subset posted political content primarily in Chinese similar to the findings in a recent Graphika report, including content related to the U.S. response to COVID-19.
- We terminated 3 YouTube channels as part of our ongoing investigation into coordinated influence operations linked to Iran. The campaign posted content in Bosnian and Arabic that was critical of the U.S. and the People's Mujahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI). This campaign was consistent with similar findings reported by Facebook.

May

- We terminated 1,098 YouTube channels as part of our ongoing investigation into coordinated influence operations linked to China. These channels mostly uploaded spammy, non-political content, but a small subset posted political content primarily in Chinese similar to the findings in a recent Graphika report, including content related to the U.S. response to COVID-19. We received leads from Graphika that supported us in this investigation.
- We terminated 47 YouTube channels and 1 AdSense account as part of our ongoing investigation into coordinated influence operations linked to Russia. The campaign posted content in a coordinated manner primarily in Russian about domestic Russian and international policy issues. This campaign was consistent with similar findings reported by Facebook.

June

- We terminated 1,312 YouTube channels as part of our ongoing investigation into coordinated influence operations linked to China. These channels mostly uploaded spammy, non-political content, but a subset posted political content primarily in Chinese similar to the findings in a recent Graphika report, including content related to racial justice protests in the U.S. This campaign was consistent with similar findings reported by Twitter.
- We terminated 17 YouTube channels as part of our ongoing investigation into coordinated influence operations linked to Russia. The campaign posted comments in Russian in a coordinated manner under a small set of Russian language videos. This campaign was consistent with similar findings reported by Twitter.

- We banned 3 Play Developers and terminated 1 advertising account as part of our actions against a coordinated influence operation. The campaign was posting news content in English and French, targeting audiences in Africa. We found evidence of this campaign being tied to the PR company Ureputation based in Tunisia. This campaign was consistent with similar findings reported by Facebook.

Threat Analysis Group Coordinated Influence Operations Bulletin – Q3 2020

This bulletin includes coordinated influence operation campaigns terminated on our platforms in July of 2020. We will continue to update this bulletin with data from Q3 as it becomes available. It was last updated on October 16, 2020.

July

- We terminated 1 advertising account and 7 YouTube channels as part of our actions against a coordinated influence operation linked to Ecuador. The campaign was linked to the PR firm Estraterra, and posted content in Spanish about former Ecuador government employees. These findings are consistent with similar findings reported by Facebook.
- We terminated 299 YouTube channels as part of our ongoing investigation into coordinated influence operations linked to China. These channels mostly uploaded spammy content in Chinese about music, entertainment, and lifestyle. A very small subset uploaded content in Chinese about COVID-19 and current events in Hong Kong. These findings are consistent with our previous reports in the Q2 TAG bulletin.

August

- We terminated 1,846 YouTube channels and 5 blogs as part of our ongoing investigation into coordinated influence operations linked to China. These channels mostly uploaded spammy content in Chinese about music, entertainment, and lifestyle. A small subset of the channels uploaded content in English about current events in Hong Kong and the U.S. response to COVID-19. These findings are consistent with our previous reports in the Q2 TAG bulletin.

- We terminated 8 YouTube channels as part of our actions against a coordinated influence operation linked to Yemen. This domestic campaign posted content in Arabic in support of the Yemeni government. This campaign was consistent with similar findings reported by Facebook.

September

- We terminated 4 YouTube channels as part of our actions against a coordinated influence operation. The campaign was linked to a U.S.-based PR firm, CLS Strategies, and posted content in Spanish about Mexican elections. This campaign was consistent with similar findings reported by Facebook.
- We terminated 1,628 YouTube channels as part of our ongoing investigation into coordinated influence operations linked to China. These channels mostly uploaded spammy content in English and Chinese about music, entertainment, and lifestyle. A small subset of the channels uploaded content in English about current events in the U.S. and the U.S. response to COVID-19. These findings are consistent with our previous reports in the Q2 TAG bulletin

4. Policies on advertising linked to COVID-19 disinformation

Information requested by the EU Commission
"Platforms should provide data on policies undertaken to limit advertising placements on their own services.

Data should be broken down by Member State and include where relevant in view of the specificities of their services:

- Number of ads rejected containing disinformation on COVID-19. Please note that data on ads removed because they promote deceptive products or services (scams) should not be included as they are part of a separate monitoring.
- Number of ad accounts terminated or suspended in application of these policies"

Preserving the integrity of our advertising platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic is a continuation of the work that we do to minimize content that violates our policies and stop malicious actors. Thousands of people work across our teams every day to make sure we're protecting our users and enabling a safe ecosystem for advertisers and publishers, and each year we share a summary of the work we've done.

In 2019, we blocked and removed globally 2.7 billion bad ads—that's more than 5,000 bad ads per minute. We also suspended nearly 1 million advertiser accounts for policy violations. On the publisher side, we terminated over 1.2 million accounts and removed ads from over 21 million web pages that are part of our publisher network for violating our policies. Terminating accounts—not just removing an individual ad or page—is an especially effective enforcement tool that we use if advertisers or publishers engage in egregious policy violations or have a history of violating policy.

As mentioned, we have a wide range of policies to protect users and the ads ecosystem at large. For instance on AdSense our Dangerous or Derogatory Content policy prohibits monetization of content "promoting or advocating for harmful health or medical claims or practices." For example, under this policy, we demonetize publisher content that includes claims about the propagation of COVID-19 that contradict the WHO guidance, such as theories involving 5G towers as a transmission vector. In addition, on July 17th we put additional safeguards in place by expanding our harmful health claims policies for both publishers and advertisers to include content about a current, major health crisis that contradicts authoritative, scientific consensus. This change went into effect mid-August.

On **Google Ads** as well as Shopping, our Sensitive Events policies do not allow ads that potentially profit from or exploit a sensitive event with significant social, cultural, or political impact, such as civil emergencies, natural disasters, public health emergencies, terrorism and related activities, conflict, or mass acts of violence.

– and we have begun treating the COVID-19 crisis as a sensitive event all around the world (including in all EU member states) by end of January 2020.

Over time, we started phasing in allowances for COVID-related ads from government organizations, healthcare providers, non-governmental organizations, intergovernmental organizations, verified election ads advertisers and managed private sector accounts with a history of policy compliance who want to get relevant information out to the public.

Ads that are allowed still have to abide by our policies, which also disallow the promotion of harmful medical or health claims and practices. In addition, we enforce a temporary restriction on masks that may be vital for healthcare workers during the COVID-19 response to prevent advertising that may capitalize on coronavirus disease and we are taking additional steps to prevent artificially inflated prices that limit or prohibit access to other essential items on Google's network.

Our Publisher policies aim to strike a delicate balance - providing room for publishers to engage, report on and express controversial topics and opinions, while ensuring we are preventing user harm and instilling trust in our advertiser partners that their ads are running against appropriate content. We also empower advertisers with choice and control; advertisers can choose whether or not their ads run on certain pages or sites through, for example, keyword, topic or webpage/video exclusion.

More information about these policies can be found in our Google Ads Help Center update page on the COVID-19 pandemic, and we are outlining below a breakdown of the actions that we took against violative Ads in EU member states. Specifically:

- Since January 2020, we've blocked or removed **over 90 million coronavirus-related ads** - including Shopping ads - from EU-based advertisers and buyers for policy violations including price-gouging, capitalizing on global medical supply shortages and making misleading claims about cures.
- We have also suspended **more than 1500 accounts** - including Merchant accounts on Shopping - from EU-based advertisers for trying to circumvent our systems, including for Covid related ads and offers.
- We have also taken action on **over 4500 URLs** with Covid related content under our Dangerous or derogatory content policy, for harmful health claims.

A member-state level breakdown of these actions is available in the table below;

Google Ads		
Member States, by 2-letter country codes	**Blocked Ads**	**Account Suspensions**
AT	9,210,640	0
BE	435,200	0
BG	20,700	0
CY	30,326	1
CZ	256,693	2
DE	10,930,093	13
DK	181,378	0
EE	7,421	0

ES	2,305,155	50
FI	30,036	0
FR	491,837	5
GR	18,097	0
HR	12,390	0
HU	18,257	0
IE	421,174	11
IT	261,014	3
LT	10,828	0
LU	6,469	0
LV	4,708	0
MT	10,777	0
NL	4,361,249	10
PL	486,590	7
PT	38,587	0
RO	38,955	1
SE	149,966	0
SI	3,970	0
SK	28,427	0
Total	**29,770,937**	**103**

Google Shopping		
Member States, by 2-letter country codes	**Blocked Offers**	**Account Suspension**
AT	3224313	116
BE	2966112	51
BG	383	0
CY	88	0
CZ	909958	71
DE	17258856	376
DK	2547278	25
EE	358	0
ES	3814528	97
FI	500105	21
FR	9091908	185
GR	478027	1

HR	279	0
HU	542515	82
IE	3168622	10
IT	5810731	69
LT	265	0
LU	109	0
LV	349	0
MT	65	0
NL	3304347	53
PL	2201250	158
PT	994515	12
RO	400136	82
SE	2777740	3
SI	797	0
SK	584774	21
Total	**60,578,408**	**1,433**

Total Ads & Shopping	**90,349,345**	**1,536**

Publisher/AdSense	
Member States, by 2-letter country codes	**Blocked URLs**
AT	9
BE	125
BG	2
CY	87
CZ	2
DE	434
DK	0
EE	0
ES	761
FI	3
FR	1121
GR	0
HR	0
HU	2

IE	3
IT	343
LT	5
LU	0
LV	1
MT	3
NL	15
PL	1642
PT	2
RO	4
SE	17
SI	2
SK	12

Total Publisher	**4595**