Written evidence submitted by TikTok

Summary

- TikTok has not seen high rates of disinformation and harmful misinformation related to Covid-19.

- However, we take our responsibilities in this regard extremely seriously. TikTok was one of the first content platforms to create an information Hub dedicated to disseminating factual Covid-19 information; our Hub in the UK launched on March 5.

- In the UK, we have collaborated with NHS UK, the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) and World Health Organization (WHO) to disseminate trusted public health information to TikTok's users.

- TikTok is tagging all Covid-19 related videos to direct users to trusted information and has introduced new policies to prevent the spread of misinformation.

- To ensure that users in the UK have access to the most reliable data online, TikTok recommends that the government establishes a joint industry-government body which coordinates best practice and shares real-time information on emerging sources of disinformation and harmful misinformation.

Introduction

As millions of people around the world adjust to social distancing and feel further apart than ever before, it has been humbling to see people turn to TikTok for moments of light relief in the face of such struggle.

By way of background, TikTok is a global platform for users to express themselves by creating and sharing short videos. Our mission is to inspire creativity and bring joy: TikTok is a place for people to be themselves. TikTok opened its UK office in 2018, and its London office is its largest in Europe.

This global health crisis is being felt by everyone and the uncertainty can have an impact on everyone's wellbeing. As a global platform, we are focusing on ways to support our community through this difficult period.

Helping our users to access trusted information is more important than ever and TikTok is deeply committed to providing a home for factual information about this global pandemic. We have been prioritising elevating accurate information from credible sources by partnering with organisations like the WHO, DHSC and the British Red Cross. In addition, we use both technologies and people to identify, review and remove abusive or dangerous content and accounts that violate our Community Guidelines. Our reporting function also allows users and non-users alike to report any inappropriate content or accounts.

TikTok welcomes the opportunity to provide written evidence to the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Sub-Committee's inquiry into "Online Harms and Disinformation". We are pleased to provide our perspective on this issue and will focus on four key areas:

1. How we work with partners to help our users access trusted and important public health information
2. Specific policies, actions and features we have put in place to tackle misinformation
3. How we are a helping our community to stay healthy and connected during lockdown
4. Recommended Next Step

1. PROMOTING TRUSTED INFORMATION

TikTok's approach to the provision of trusted information on Covid-19 is threefold:

- Directing TikTok users to trusted public health information when they search for Covid-19.
- Partnering with health organisations to bring factual and trusted information to the TikTok community.
- Monitoring, flagging and removing disinformation and harmful misinformation related to Covid-19. (covered in section 2)

We help our users gain access to trusted and verifiable information by directing them to our Covid-19 Hub[1]. Globally, The Hub has had over 350 million views and in the UK, it has had 14 million views. When users search for Covid-19, coronavirus or other related hashtags or terms, they are directed to our "learn the facts about Covid-19" Hub. To ensure as many users as possible are directed towards The Hub, it is permanently pinned to the top of the Discover tab (the key way in which a user discovers and explores content on TikTok) within the app. We also use artificial intelligence to identify and review videos related to coronavirus and tag this content with a link directing users to our Covid-19 Hub page.

This Hub provides three key areas of information from the WHO: advice on how to avoid catching the virus, helpful 'mythbusters' content and a series of questions and answers about the global pandemic. We work in partnership with other organisations to compliment the content on The Hub, including a series of posts from trusted organisations such as the British Red Cross.

TikTok is also supporting national and international health authorities to communicate their content, working with organisations to ensure they have an account and are sufficiently equipped to design and post their content.

For example, content posted by the International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC) has been viewed 17 million times on TikTok. In the UK, we are working directly with HM Government to run PSAs supporting government messages such as 'stay home to save lives', and will continue to do so over the coming weeks. TikTok is also working with specific government departments and the National Health Service to ensure that their TikTok content reaches as wide an audience as possible. Over the last four weeks alone, there have been over 330 million views of factual health care-related hashtags in the UK.

Specific examples of the above include:

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[1] https://www.tiktok.com/safety/resources/Covid-19

- Partnering with the UK and French Governments to run a full screen in-app splash ad ("TopView") encouraging users to stay at home. The PSA was seen by 40 million people across both countries.

- Partnering with Sky News to live stream the UK government's daily Covid-19 press conference.

- Hosting a "stay at home, saves lives" video post by Health Secretary Matthew Hancock viewed by millions of UK users.

- Collaborating with the DHSC to promote a series of videos created by Dr Alex George, a celebrity A&E doctor, which advises users on cleaning their hands[2] and addresses inaccurate conspiracy theories.

2. Tackling disinformation and harmful misinformation

TikTok is a platform for positive, creative expression, and keeping our users safe is a top priority at all times. Although we have seen a very small proportion of content promoting Covid-19 misinformation on TikTok, we have taken a series of proactive steps to ensure that our community is protected from those that seek to spread misinformation. We have set out the specific policies, actions and features below:

- Our [Community Guidelines](#) detail how we define harmful or unsafe content that is not permitted on the platform. We do not allow content intended to mislead our community, such as impersonation, spamming, phishing, or disinformation campaigns. We also do not permit misinformation that could cause harm to our community or the larger public, including content meant to incite fear, hate, or prejudice, and that which may harm an individual's health or wider public safety.

- With specific regard to Covid-19, we have introduced several new policies to respond to trends we are seeing and protect our users:

  - **Medical misinformation:** we remove false medical advice about coronavirus that could cause imminent harm to a user's health, or could cause harm to public safety by discouraging people from seeking helpful medical treatment.

  - **Misinformation likely to cause societal panic and real-world harm:** we remove content (e.g. 5G conspiracy theories) that is likely to stoke panic and consequently result in real world harm.

  - **Hate speech:** we remove content that suggests a certain race, ethnicity, gender or any member of a protected group is more susceptible to have and/or spread Covid-19.

- We have enabled users to easily report videos they believe contain misinformation about Covid-19. If a user comes across content on TikTok that appears to contain misleading information about coronavirus, they can report the content, select "Misleading information" and then "Covid-19 misinformation" as the reason for their report. Each report is reviewed promptly by a dedicated team and appropriate action

[2] https://www.tiktok.com/@dralexgeorge/video/6800402791870319878?source=h5_m

is then taken.

In addition to these efforts we are also:

- Partnering with UK-based NGO and the Behavioural Insights Team to develop a media literacy campaign focused on misinformation related in the short-term to coronavirus.

- Exploring additional partnerships that will enhance our existing efforts to tackle misinformation.

3. How we are a helping our community stay healthy and connected during lockdown

TikTok is a platform for positive, creative expression and during this time, it has been humbling to see so many turn to TikTok to find brief moments of relief and joy.

Whether it's families bonding over the #BlindingLightsChallenge dance, TikTok creators looking out for one another in the #NeighbourhoodWatch challenge, or even learning how to #WorkOutFromHome - we've been amazed at how our community has adapted to the challenges of life under lockdown with energy, positivity and creativity.

On 23 March, TikTok began rolling out a series of live streams under #HouseofTikTok - featuring some of its creators and celebrities, aimed at helping to keep people active, entertained and informed as they spend more time at home. #HouseofTikTok now has almost 1 billion views. Some of the content featured:

- @dr_julie_smith advising our community about how to use positive psychology to manage your mindset
- Olympic gold medallist @damekellyholmes teaching people her home workout routine
- Content featuring families in lockdown together, including creators like @grandadjoe1933 whose light-hearted isolation videos featuring his family have seen his following shoot past the 1 million mark in recent

We have also seen a tremendous response from the NHS and healthcare workers. NHS UK has opened a TikTok account to show gratitude for the support the NHS has received from the British public. Our #ThankYouNHS campaign has had more than 400 million views and over 23 million people have engaged with our #ClapForOurCarers videos.

We are also seeing frontline healthcare workers posting videos while they're taking a break at work. Some are creating fun and light-hearted videos to communicate a serious message on staying at home, while others are just looking for a quick laugh with their colleagues and taking part in dance challenges during their meal break. Some examples below, usually

tagged to #nhs - [Shujina Begum](); [Alice Marson in York](); [Sarah in Yorkshire](); [Emma Kirkpatrick](); [Dr Karan Raj]().

The positive engagement we have seen with this type of content demonstrates that our community views TikTok as a place to express themselves in a positive manner. Videos thanking healthcare workers or spreading supportive messages have proven to be amongst the most popular on TikTok; our users gravitate to this type of content.

As the scale and impact of coronavirus is growing, at TikTok we want to do our bit to help ease the burden being felt by some of the communities who have been impacted by the pandemic. TikTok's global Health Heroes Relief Fund has been established to help the heroes of this global battle.

Using this Fund, in the UK TikTok is donating £5m to the Covid-19 Healthcare Support Appeal, established by the Royal College of Nursing Foundation. The donation will provide emergency funding to thousands of frontline healthcare workers - including nurses, midwives, physios, paramedics, cleaners and porters - who are in need of immediate practical financial support, as well as psychological support both during and after the coronavirus emergency.

4. Recommended Next Step

Looking forward, we recommend that the Sub-Committee focus its analysis and recommendations on how companies can work better together to collaborate and share information to combat disinformation and harmful misinformation, as well as how we can collectively continue to work closely with Government on this important issue.

We have seen welcome steps taken by the Government in response to Covid-19. This has included the Rapid Response Unit, which is rebutting false information about COVD-19 online, and the "Don't Feed the Beast" public information campaign, which we are very happy to promote to TikTok users via our free ad credits programme.

We would encourage Government to continue its engagement with industry as we work collectively to tackle the important area of dis and misinformation on Covid-19 and other issues that may arise in the future. TikTok is keen to support any effort to keep users safe and to help promote factual information to its community.

Useful links

Covid-19 - Safety Centre
https://www.tiktok.com/safety/resources/Covid-19?lang=en&appLaunch=web