



Answers to Questions on Notice
Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Media Diversity Inquiry

September 2021

QUESTIONS TAKEN ON NOTICE
PUBLIC HEARING

Question	Answer
<p>[Senator Carr] I refer to an article published on Friday 6 August in the Age which indicated that, prior to your informing Sky News of the first strike, back in December 2020, 14 videos had been removed by Google. Is that correct?</p> <p>Ms Longcroft: The information I have to hand is that the 23 videos that were removed were the subject of a warning on 20 December. I'm not familiar with the videos in the news article to which you refer, but I'd be pleased to take that question on notice and follow up with further detail.</p>	<p>That is incorrect. We removed two videos in December 2020 and another 21 videos after 29 July 2021, which is when the strike was issued.</p>
<p>[Senator Rennick]: Does Google's parent company Alphabet own 12 per cent of Vaccitech, which has an interest in the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine?</p> <p>Ms Longcroft: I could not answer that in particular detail, but I would be happy to follow up on notice.</p>	<p>GV is an independent, return-driven fund. Today GV has more than \$5 billion under management, with Alphabet as its sole limited partner. GV invests across all stages and sectors, with a focus on enterprise, life sciences, consumer, and frontier technology. A list of those investments, including in Vaccitech, are publicly available and can be found at the following link: https://www.gv.com/portfolio</p>
<p>[Senator Antic]: Earlier today, there were some suggestions that there were efforts to remove far-Right material and abhorrent material, which is absolutely reasonable. Can you direct me to instances where Google and YouTube have removed individual video content that comes from</p>	<p>YouTube does not publish the specifics of enforcement action taken against channels, including Sky, however we do publish aggregate statistics in our YouTube Community Guidelines Enforcement Report.</p>

<p>the far Left—for example, videos of Extinction Rebellion protesters creating a nuisance by gluing themselves to public property? Those would be the kinds of instances that presumably would fall afoul of your guidelines as well. Are you able to direct me to some instances where those videos from perhaps the far Left have been removed?</p> <p>Ms Longcroft: Our policies, as you imply, are applied equally across the political spectrum. We reject all forms of political bias in our systems and in the application of those policies. In fact, a Pew Research Center report and New York University recent finding found that there is no evidence of political bias in our application of our policies. Therefore, they are applied against incitement to violence or hateful conduct across the political spectrum. I wouldn't point to particular examples in this case, but our transparency report and the enforcement reports of our community guidelines give a full range of information about the nature of videos that are removed.</p> <p>Senator ANTIC: Could you take that on notice. I put it to you that there won't be very many instances where that's happened. In relation to videos that originally ridiculed the now credited Wuhan lab leak thesis, are you aware of any videos that have now been deleted as a result of that being misinformation or disinformation as you =call it?</p> <p>Ms Longcroft: I'm not aware of any videos being deleted in relation to the Wuhan lab virus origins, but I'd also be prepared to take that question on notice and ensure that we provide accurate information.</p>	<p>We apply our policies transparently and consistently, without taking into account either the political leanings of the author, or their place in society. We enforce our policies equally.</p> <p>Incitement to violence is not allowed under our violent or graphic content policies. Anyone can report a video to be reviewed against this & our other YouTube policies at any time if they identify material they have concerns about.</p>
<p>[Chair]: Has the media regulator, the ACMA, sought further information about the concerns that you had?</p> <p>Ms Longcroft: We are in regular contact with the ACMA around a variety of issues, including misinformation and disinformation. We did receive a</p>	<p>Please see correspondence attached.</p>

<p>communication from the ACMA after we issued the strike against Sky News, and that became public, with a request for certain information that we provided to them.</p> <p>CHAIR: Would we be able to get a copy of that letter and the exchange for this committee's deliberations, please?</p> <p>Ms Longcroft: I would be pleased to provide it, subject, of course, to the ACMA agreeing to make that information—</p> <p>CHAIR: I'll be asking them anyway. That's fine.</p>	
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ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FROM SENATOR RENNICK

Question	Answer
Does YouTube/Google's parent Alphabet own shares in vaccine companies?	GV is an independent, return-driven fund. Today GV has more than \$5 billion under management, with Alphabet as its sole limited partner. GV invests across all stages and sectors, with a focus on enterprise, life sciences, consumer, and frontier technology. A list of those investments, including in Vaccitech, are publicly available and can be found at the following link: https://www.gv.com/portfolio/
If so why doesn't Google/YouTube declare these interests when censoring posts/running search algorithms about Covid treatments including vaccines?	We remove content that violates our YouTube Community Guidelines as quickly as possible. We are dedicated to providing access to information and freedom of expression, but YouTube has always had clear and robust content policies. For example, we have never allowed pornography, incitement to violence, content that would harm children, or harassment. We set and publicly share information about our Community Guidelines to provide clear guidance on content that is not allowed on the platform. These include public policies against spam, deceptive practices, scams, and identity misrepresentation and impersonation. We consistently enforce those guidelines

	through a combination of technology and people.
Does Alphabet or its subsidiaries receive payments from Pharmaceutical companies to censor posts or run algorithms that censor information on Covid treatments?	No.
How many people censor information regarding medical information on Covid and what qualifications do these people have?	YouTube's Community Guidelines on COVID-19 medical misinformation prohibits content that spreads medical disinformation that contradicts the World Health Organization (WHO) or local health authorities' medical information about COVID-19.
Who regulates these people and are they approved by health authorities in respective countries to censor posts or prioritise searches?	We work with multiple Departments and regulators on content moderation issues including the eSafety Commissioner, the ACMA, the Department of Infrastructure, Communications and the Arts, the Department of Health and the Department of Home Affairs. We keep them updated on our policies and provide opportunities for them to provide feedback. To date, we have not received any specific feedback on our COVID-19 misinformation policies but would be happy to receive it if they would like to provide it. We are in regular communication with relevant Ministers' offices as well, who likewise have the opportunity to provide any feedback at any time about the operation of our policies.

4 August 2021

Ms Lucinda Longcroft
Director, Government Affairs and Public Policy
Google Australia
48 Pirrama Road
Pyrmont, NSW 2009

Dear Ms Longcroft

YouTube's recent decision to suspend Sky News content

I am writing to seek additional information about Google's decision to temporarily suspend Sky News from uploading content to YouTube.

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) has received a number of complaints about recent broadcasts, all of which have been referred to Sky for initial response in accordance with the co-regulatory complaints scheme established under the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* (the BSA).

In addition, as you would be aware, we have received a number of related media enquiries and are likely, shortly, to be called to give evidence to the Senate Environment and Communications current Media Diversity inquiry.

Given this and our related role in overseeing the development of the Australian Code of Practice on Disinformation and Misinformation, the ACMA would like to understand:

- What particular content breached YouTube's policies and what prompted the removal of the content (i.e. user reports, Youtube monitoring activities or automated detection)?
- To your knowledge, was any of the same content also delivered via a terrestrial broadcasting platform (either on Sky or one of its affiliated commercial television partners)?
- Was the decision to suspend the content taken under Google's understanding of its obligations under the Australian Code of Practice on Disinformation and Misinformation?
- Has Google updated its COVID-19 misinformation policy since its report to DIGI in May 2021?

It would be appreciated if you could provide responses to my questions August 2021. Please don't hesitate to contact me or Cathy Rainsford, General Manager of the Content and Consumer Division on .

Yours sincerely,

Creina Chapman



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Thursday 12 August 2021

Creina Chapman
Deputy Chair and CEO
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The Bay Centre
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Pyrmont NSW 2009

BY EMAIL:

Dear Ms Chapman,

Thank you for your letter dated 4 August requesting information relating to the decision to impose a seven day suspension on Sky News from uploading any new content onto YouTube.

In response to your questions:

1. What particular content breached YouTube's policies and what prompted the removal of the content (i.e. user reports, YouTube monitoring activities or automated detection)?

A piece of content can be flagged for review either by our community of users or by our machine learning technology. Our review teams then perform a manual review of the content in question to decide whether this is violative or not. In this instance, a Sky News video was elevated for human review, which then prompted a manual human review of a number of flagged videos uploaded within Sky News' YouTube channel. In reviewing this set of flagged videos, it was confirmed that about 20 videos were violative of our policies and removed, under the [COVID-19 medical misinformation policy](#) and the [election misinformation policy](#).

2. To your knowledge, was any of the same content also delivered via a terrestrial broadcasting platform (either on Sky or one of its affiliated commercial television partners)?

We would not be able to speak to any alternative delivery channels used by YouTube partners, however we understand that Sky News' most common practice is to upload videos onto YouTube that had been broadcast on their owned and operated broadcasting channels.

3. Was the decision to suspend the content taken under Google's understanding of its obligations under the Australian Code of Practice on Digi?

The decision to issue a strike against the Sky News YouTube channel was taken in accordance with YouTube's [Community Guidelines](#), specifically the [COVID-19 medical misinformation policy](#). These policies align with Google's obligations under the Australian Code of Practice on Misinformation and Disinformation. We apply these policies consistently, transparently and equally across all content creators on YouTube.

4. Has Google updated its COVID-19 misinformation policy since its report to DIGI in May 2021?

The only update since May 2021 was an expansion to our exceptions for Education, Documentary, Scientific or Artistic content as follows: "We may also make exceptions for content showing an open public forum, like a protest or public hearing, provided the content does not aim to promote misinformation that violates our policies."

Please don't hesitate to contact us if we can provide any further information to assist.

Yours sincerely,

Lucinda Longcroft
Director
Government Affairs and Public Policy
Google Australia