September 2023

PLATFORMS' POLICIES ON CLIMATE CHANGE MISINFORMATION

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INTRODUCTION AND KEY FINDINGS

- Climatology experts have warned of the dangers of climate change for decades, and the decisive influence of human activity in global warming. However, coming from different spheres and with the loudspeaker of social media networks, messages that contradict or question the scientific evidence continue to spread. They, overall, seek to sow doubt about the severity of the crisis in order to delay climate action.

- This factsheet delves into platforms' policies on climate change misinformation[1], focusing on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X/Twitter and YouTube. In recent years, these very large online platforms (VLOPs) have taken varying approaches to climate as a distinct vector of harm across their products and services, and tried to incorporate or strengthen actions in this regard.

- In addition to their content moderation framework, some platforms guide users on how to spot false or misleading content, while also focusing on the need to boost media literacy and engagement programmes to tackle climate misinformation. Most of the platforms claim to have made strong commitments to curb climate change, for example with their own corporate targets on carbon emissions reduction and wider awareness-raising initiatives.

- Platforms today should not limit their activities to assessing and moderating misleading or harmful organic content, but also demonetise and reduce the financial incentive for climate denialism through ad tech services and revenue-sharing schemes, in line with the Digital Services Act.

- Many platforms are taking steps to flag misleading and false content related to climate change, but they often lack comprehensive policies to combat this issue. However, platforms frequently do not disclose enough information about the prevalence of climate misinformation and rarely provide reports on the effectiveness of their own efforts to mitigate it. This lack of transparency makes it challenging for both researchers and the public to fully grasp the extent of the problem. As a result, data regarding the prevalence of climate change dis/ and misinformation and the measures taken to address it is in short supply. X / Twitter stands out as a particularly poor performer in this regard.

- To address this issue, there is a critical need for lawmakers to implement robust regulation, such as the Digital Services Act (DSA), to combat the spread of climate dis/ and misinformation effectively.

- The next pages offer a cheat sheet to navigate how five platforms define and address climate change misinformation, and which actions are currently in place to limit the impact of such content. Moreover, for each category analysed, the common traits across platforms are highlighted.

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1   Despite the deliberate dissemination of inaccurate and false information regarding climate change from various sources, the factsheet employs the term 'misinformation' in accordance with the terminology preferred by online platforms.

DEFINITIONS AND ACTORS

Platform	Definition of climate change misinformation	Rationale for removing climate change misinformation	User resources on climate provided by platform	Internal actors	External collaborators
Facebook	Content determined as false by an authoritative third party and subject-matter experts.	Help educate and inform people about the realities of climate change.	Climate Science Center; Climate Info Finder tool.	Automated tools and human content moderators: Keyword detection; Behavioural Insights Team.	Third-party fact-checking organisations; partnership with authoritative organisations (Climate Science Literacy Initiative with Monash, Cambridge, Yale); Climate Misinformation Grant program; Climate pledges with United Nations.
Instagram	Content determined false by an authoritative third party and subject-matter experts.	Help educate and inform people about the realities of climate change.	Climate Science Literacy Service	Automated tools and human content moderators: Keyword detection; Behavioural Insights Team.	Third-party fact-checking organisations.
YouTube	Non-existent.	Non-existent.	Non-existent.	Automated tools and human content moderators.[2]	Unclear.
TikTok	Content that disavows the established scientific consensus.[3]	Empower accurate climate discussions and reduce harmful content.	Search features directing users towards authoritative information.	Automated tools. Human content moderators.	Third-party fact-checkers.[4] Partnership with authoritative organisations (UN).
X/Twitter	Non-existent.	Non-existent.	Unclear.	Unclear.	Non-existent.

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2   YouTube does not ban climate denial videos but does track them to prevent ads from running on them. More precisely, its policy does not allow video ads that "contradict the authoritative scientific consensus on the existence and causes behind climate change".
3   This definition refers to content that is not allowed by the platform.
4   For more info related to the EU: https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-eu/an-update-on-our-work-in-countering-misinformation

TYPES OF ACTIONS

Platform	1. Labelling of climate change misinformation	2. Downranking of climate change misinformation	3. Demonetisation of climate change misinformation	4. Strike policy	5. Removal of climate change misinformation
Facebook	Warning labels and third-party fact-checker rating system.	Restrictions include reducing the visibility of content and removal from algorithmic-based recommender systems.	Content that has been rated false by a third-party fact-checker is ineligible to monetise.	Meta's strike policy for violating Community Standards. On Facebook, strikes will lead to different restrictions.[5]	Content removal will be applied when it violates Meta's general Community Standards and Ads policies.[6]
Instagram	Warning labels and third-party fact-checker rating system.	Restrictions include reducing the visibility of content and removal from algorithmic-based recommender systems.	Content that has been rated false by a third-party fact-checker is ineligible to monetise.	Meta's strike policy for violating Community Guidelines.	Content removal will be applied when it violates Instagram Community Guidelines and Ads policies.
YouTube	Non-existent.	Non-existent.	Prohibits monetisation of content that contradicts well-established scientific consensus around the existence and causes of climate change.	Strike policy for violating Community Standards.	Non-existent.
TikTok	Warning labels only if fact-checking results are inconclusive. TikTok prompt people to reconsider sharing such content.	Content becomes ineligible for recommendation into anyone's 'For You feed'.[7]	Content is ineligible to monetise if it does not abide by the Community Guidelines (where climate change misinformation is included).	Strike policy for violating the Community Guidelines.	Climate change misinformation is, in theory, actively removed by the platform if undermining well-established scientific consensus.
X/Twitter	Non-existent.	Non-existent.	Non-existent.	Non-existent.	Non-existent.

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5   This policy is wholly unenforced according to ISD's report Deny, Deceive, Delay.
6   For example, if it contains dangerous hate speech or it leads to imminent physical harm.
7   This means that as a user we could still search for and find the content, but the platform will not proactively curate the content in our newsfeed.

TYPE OF CONTENT

Platform	Organic content	Advertisement content
Facebook	Climate change misinformation casting doubt on the existence of climate change and scientific data, minimising its impact, discrediting solutions to climate change or promoting climate 'doomism'.	Meta prohibits ads that include content debunked by third-party fact-checkers. Advertisers that repeatedly post information deemed to be false may have restrictions placed on their ability to advertise across Meta technologies. Meta requires all active ads to be available in the public Ad Library and provide additional information for those ads engaging in advocacy around energy and/or climate change.
Instagram	Climate change misinformation casting doubt on the existence of climate change and scientific data, minimising its impact, discrediting solutions to climate change or promoting climate 'doomism'.	Meta prohibits ads that include content debunked by third-party fact-checkers. Advertisers that repeatedly post information deemed to be false may have restrictions placed on their ability to advertise across Meta technologies. Meta requires all active ads to be available in the public Ad Library and provide additional information for those ads engaging in advocacy around energy and/or climate change.
YouTube	Non-existent.	Advertising policies prohibit content referring to climate change as a hoax or a scam, or which includes claims denying that long-term trends show the global climate is warming, and claims denying that greenhouse gas emissions or human activity contribute to climate change.
TikTok	Climate change misinformation denying the existence of climate change or the human factors that contribute to its proliferation.	Advertising Policies (Industry entry and Ad Creatives) do not specifically prohibit climate change misinformation among the long list of content bans. However, it is mentioned that ad creatives must adhere to TikTok Community Guidelines (where climate change misinformation is included).
X/Twitter	Non-existent.	Unclear if the prohibition of misleading advertisements that contradict the scientific consensus on climate change has been implemented.[8]

8   This was launched months before Elon Musk's arrival and it is not certain if it was put in place: https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2022/accelerating-our-climate-commitments-on-earth-day. It is not included in the ads content policy of X/Twitter: https://business.twitter.com/en/help/ads-policies/ads-content-policies/inappropriate-content.html

CROSS-PLATFORM COMPARISON

Common traits	Facebook	Instagram	YouTube	TikTok	X/Twitter
Definition of climate change misinformation based on falsity and/or of a misleading nature	X	X	*	X	
Definition of climate change misinformation based on third-party assessment	X	X		X	
Rationale for removing climate change misinformation based on risk of harm	X	X		X	
Specific climate change resources	X	X		X	**
Human content moderators	X	X	X	X	
Collaboration with climate authorities and organisations	X	X	X		
Collaboration with fact-checkers	X	X		X	
Labelling of climate change misinformation	X	X		X	
Downranking of climate change misinformation	X	X		X	
Demonetisation of climate change misinformation	X	X	X	X	
Strike policy	X	X	X	X	
Removal of climate change misinformation	X	X		X	
Prohibition of climate change misinformation	X	X		X	
Advertising standards for climate change misinformation	X	X	X	X	***

* Non-existent. We only found this by Google, with a reference to the 'science domain', but it looks to be a very broad definition.

** In 2021, the platform launched a pre-bunk climate disinformation hub, but it doesn't seem to have been implemented.

*** X/Twitter removes content that violates its rules, but climate change misinformation is not explicitly mentioned in their rules, thus it is unclear. Also, in April 2022, the platform announced that it would ban 'misleading' ads on climate change, but it seems this measure has not been applied. It is worth mentioning that Twitter/X reversed previous policies after Elon Musk came into post, for example around COVID-19 and electoral integrity.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

- Platforms are stepping up enforcement of climate change disinformation actions. Currently, only[9] TikTok has included climate change in its specific misinformation [policy](#).

    - On Meta, climate disinformation is framed within their sustainability [policies](#).

    - On YouTube, climate disinformation measures only apply to paid content ([monetised](#) videos and paid advertising), but the platform does not clarify how it applies to other content. We found a Google [white paper](#) announcing that visibility of misinformative 'science-related videos' would be limited on YouTube. We can only assume that potential climate misinformation is included under that thematic domain.

    - On X/Twitter, the situation is extremely worrying. Climate change is not referred to in any of its [policies](#), which do not explain if X/Twitter misinformation-related policies apply to climate change. The closest thing to a policy position is that, in April 2022, the platform [announced](#) that it would ban 'misleading' ads on climate change. Also, in 2021, the platform allegedly launched a pre-bunk climate disinformation hub. However, since the arrival of Elon Musk it is unknown if both measures have been implemented.

    - TikTok has adopted an excessively mild approach regarding its ads policy. It provides a long list of non-publishable articles/content, but none explicitly refers to climate change misinformation.[10]

- Although most platforms are flagging certain misleading and false content about climate change, there are still significant gaps in their policies. Some recent studies denounced the lack of effectiveness of the platforms when tracking this type of disinformation (see some of these reports here: [TikTok](#), [YouTube](#), [Facebook](#), X/[Twitter](#)). The climate emergency is indeed a challenge for VLOPs when it comes to how to address harmful content while respecting freedom of expression.

- Platforms are not completely data transparent about the prevalence of climate misinformation, as they rarely publish reports on the success or failure of their internal mitigation actions in this regard. We only came across sporadic statements, like Facebook's [claim](#) that "misinformation about climate change constitutes a very low percentage of total misinformation in our apps". In addition, we consider that borderline content should be assessed by authorised experts in the subject to determine if it can be classified as misinformation. This simple action would help alleviate the current information disorder. We also align ourselves with the conclusions drawn from the ranking [In the Dark](#), produced by Friends of Earth, Avaaz and Greenpeace, which reviews transparency and response efforts to climate mis- and disinformation.

- Navigating the platforms' policy pages is often difficult – especially Meta's, where there is some confusion on whether provisions apply to Facebook alone, or Facebook and Instagram together. Overall, there is a lack of linearity regarding 'what resource does what', namely the 'about.meta.com', 'transparency.fb.com' or the 'oversightboard.com' sites. Furthermore, clear dates of the various publications are often missing, so that one is unaware what is the latest measure in place, or if a new webpage has been created rather than updating an existing one.

- On a positive note, some of these platforms are guiding their users through the climate debate by promoting digital literacy skills and raising awareness on the topics online.

- Finally, we trust that the Digital Services Act (DSA) will bring better platform accountability around climate-related disinformation. To achieve this, there is an urgent need, to train experts to understand the mechanisms of the novel internal complaint handling system (Article 20) or to being able to assess whether there is a systemic risk (Article 34) of spreading climate-related illegal and harmful content online. Therefore, it is crucial to invest in capacity building within the community to apply the DSA so that it brings positive change to our environment (pun intended).

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9   Pinterest is not included in this document, but it is worth mentioning that the platform has articulated measures against climate misinformation that apply to both paid and organic content.

10   Tik Tok only mentions that ad creatives must adhere to their Terms of Service and Community Guidelines.