Anti-abortion clinics that try to trick women face new Google ad policy

Enlarge / MONTGOMERY, Ala. – MAY 19, 2019: A protestor dressed as a character from the Hulu TV show *The Handmaid's Tale*, based on the best-selling novel by Margaret Atwood, walks back to her car after participating in a rally against one of the nation's most restrictive bans on abortions.

reader comments

200 with 75 posters participating

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Google will roll out a policy next month to crack down on deceptive advertisements dealing with abortion—a topic rife with misleading and false health information.

The policy changes come amid backlash from a report in The Guardian saying that the tech giant granted $150,000 worth of free advertisements to The Obria Group, which runs a network of clinics across the United States that are funded by Catholic organizations. Obria's advertisements have suggested that the clinics (aka Crisis Pregnancy Centers) provide abortions and other medical services. But the clinics are in fact opposed to abortion and all forms of contraception, including condoms. According to The Guardian, the misleading advertisements are an attempt to bait "abortion-minded women" so that the clinics can then deter them from terminating their pregnancies.

To ostensibly address this problem, Google will now require

all advertisers in the United States, Ireland, and the United Kingdom who run abortion-related ads to submit to a pre-certification. The process is intended to identify the types of services that the advertisers provide. All of their subsequent advertising will then be automatically and clearly labeled with either “Provides abortions” or “Does not provide abortions.”

In an online statement announcing the policy change, Google made no mention of the Obria case. Instead, it wrote that “This added transparency will help ensure that users have the necessary information to decide which abortion-related ads are most relevant to them.”

Abortion fiction

The transparency step could help steer users away from the misleading or outright false information that runs rampant in communications regarding abortion, particularly from anti-abortion groups. Google’s efforts to address this long-standing problem come at a critical time. Several conservative states in the US have worked to enact highly restrictive laws around the medical procedure, largely with the goal of overturning *Roe v. Wade*. Alabama passed a near-total ban on abortion, even in the case of rape and incest, for instance.

With the political pressure around the issue ratcheting up, so is the misinformation. Many anti-abortion groups continue to propagate falsehoods, such as the myth that induced abortions increase a woman’s risk of breast cancer (they do not) and depression (nope).

Currently, the Christian-niche, anti-abortion movie *Unplanned* is thriving among conservative audiences while falsely suggesting that a 13-week-old fetus has the ability to feel pain and be aware of an abortion procedure. “There is no neurological capability for awareness of danger—that part of the brain is simply not there yet,” an obstetrician noted to

The New York Times.

In perhaps the most egregious case, a Ohio bill would allow health insurance plans to cover “[a] procedure for an ectopic pregnancy, that is intended to reimplant the fertilized ovum into the pregnant woman’s uterus.” An ectopic pregnancy is one in which a fertilized egg implants in the wrong place, such as a fallopian tube. The pregnancy is always nonviable, and the condition can be life-threatening for the mother. There is absolutely no medical procedure that can move the fertilized egg or save the pregnancy. One obstetrician called the bill’s provision “pure science fiction.”

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