YouTube Details How the Pandemic Affected Content Moderation

YouTube said the second quarter of 2020 marked the most videos it ever removed in a single quarter for violations of its community guidelines.

The Google-owned video site attributed steps it took to rely more on technology and ease the burden on its content review teams during the pandemic as a major factor behind the high numbers in its community guidelines enforcement report for the quarter.

YouTube wrote in a blog post, “When reckoning with greatly reduced human review capacity due to Covid-19, we were forced to make a choice between potential underenforcement or potential overenforcement. One option was to dial back our technology and limit our enforcement to only what could be handled with our diminished review capacity. This would maintain a high level of accuracy, but would result in less content being removed from YouTube, including some content that violates our policies. The other option was to use our automated systems to cast a wider net so that the most content that could potentially harm the community would be quickly removed from YouTube, with the knowledge that many videos would not receive a human review, and some of the videos that do not violate our policies would be removed.”

Those decisions resulted in more than double the number of videos removed from the platform in the second quarter than in the first quarter, as well as an increase of more than three times n removal of content that YouTube’s systems suspected

was tied to violent extremism or was potentially harmful to children.

One concession made by the video site: Strikes are not being issued on content that is removed without human review, except in cases where YouTube has “very high confidence” that its policies are being violated.

Another was easing the appeals process for people who believe their videos were removed in error, and YouTube said that while fewer than 3% of video removals are appealed, both the number of appeals and the reinstatement rate doubled in the second quarter compared with the previous three months, with the latter rising to 50% from 25%.

YouTube concluded, “The impact of Covid-19 has been felt in every part of the world and in every corner of our business. Through these challenging times, our commitment to responsibility remains steadfast. We’ve taken extraordinary steps to make sure we live up to that commitment—protecting viewers by quickly removing content that violates our policies and minimizing the disruption felt by creators. We are continuing to improve the accuracy of our systems and, as reviewers are able to come back to work, we are deploying them to the highest impact areas. We’ll continue to regularly update the community on our progress.”

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