

Twitter says it's removed more than 1,100 misleading coronavirus tweets

Since March 18, Twitter has required users to take down tweets that could increase the spread of the coronavirus.

Twitter has removed more than 1,100 misleading and potentially harmful tweets since March 18 when the company rolled out new guidance that barred content that could increase the spread of the novel coronavirus, the social network said Wednesday.



Twitter also said that its automated systems have challenged more than 1.5 million accounts using spammy or manipulative behavior to target discussions around COVID-19, the respiratory illness caused by the virus. The new data comes as social media companies face criticism for not doing enough to crack down on coronavirus hoaxes.

Since introducing these policies, we have removed more than 1,100 tweets containing misleading and potentially harmful content from Twitter. Our automated systems have also challenged more than 1.5 million accounts which were targeting manipulative discussions around COVID-19.

— Twitter Safety (@TwitterSafety) April 1, 2020

Twitter declined to provide the tweets it removed, but since March 18 the company has been pulling down content from high-profile figures including the presidents of Brazil and Venezuela. On Sunday, the company

removed two tweets by Brazil's president, Jair Bolsonaro, that reportedly included videos of the politician questioning social distancing. Last week, the company deleted a tweet by Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro for recommending the use of a "natural brew" as a potential cure for the coronavirus.

Twitter also removed a tweet from Rudy Giuliani, US President Donald Trump's personal attorney, for spreading misinformation about the coronavirus, and temporarily locked the lawyer's account. In the tweet, Giuliani quoted conservative activist Charlie Kirk, who falsely claimed that "hydroxychloroquine has been shown to have a 100% effective rate treating COVID-19." Clinical trials are still needed to prove whether the drug is effective, but there've been anecdotal reports that it could have some benefit, according to the US Department of Health and Human Services.

Despite efforts to crack down on coronavirus misinformation, some posts are still slipping through the cracks. The New York Times reported earlier in March that dozens of videos, photos and posts that include coronavirus information still pop up on social media. Twitter has also allowed tweets that include racist and xenophobic remarks about Asians and China to remain on its site.

The company left up a tweet from Tesla CEO and co-founder Elon Musk that stated "kids are essentially immune" from COVID-19. Kids can catch the virus, but Twitter didn't pull down Musk's tweet because the company determined what he said wasn't "definitive," Axios reported.

Under Twitter's new guidance, the social network barred tweets that go against the recommendations of local and global health authorities or encourage the use of ineffective or harmful treatments. Some of the examples Twitter provided included tweets that state, "social distancing is not effective" and "if you can hold your breath for 10 seconds, you do not have coronavirus." The company is cracking down on other types of misinformation, including false claims that specific groups and nationalities such as Asians are more susceptible to COVID-19.

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