

TikTok videos pushing QAnon, COVID vaccine conspiracies surging despite crackdown, report says

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Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

TikTok videos promoting QAnon and anti-vaccine conspiracies are surging in popularity despite a crackdown by the popular social media

app, according to a new report shared exclusively with U.S. TODAY.

Bogus claims spreading under the hashtag #GlobalRebellion4Freedom include a shadow government setting up FEMA detention camps and Bill Gates and Dr. Anthony Fauci causing COVID to profit from it.

And these TikTok videos are reaching a wide audience. Views increased from 17,600 on March 5 to 1.1 million views on March 29, according to Advance Democracy, a research organization that studies disinformation and extremism.

Advance Democracy searched Facebook and Twitter for the hashtag and found few posts.

After being alerted by U.S. TODAY, TikTok took down the 10 prominent accounts promoting the #GlobalRebellion4Freedom hashtag.

"TikTok announced last year that they would remove content and accounts connected to the QAnon conspiracy, as well as COVID-19 vaccine misinformation. Yet this month we're seeing a massive surge in a hashtag that correlates to both," said Daniel Jones, president of Advance Democracy. "Now, more than ever, social media platforms need to ensure they are not amplifying dangerous conspiracy theories likely to adversely impact public health."

In a statement, TikTok said that content and accounts that promote QAnon violate its disinformation policy and are removed from the platform.

"We've also taken significant steps to make this content harder to find across search and hashtags by redirecting associated terms to our Community Guidelines," the statement said. "We continually update our safeguards with misspellings and new phrases as we work to keep

TikTok a safe and authentic place for our community."

TikTok also says it prohibits content that's false or misleading, including misinformation related to COVID-19 and vaccines.

Concern about the spread of falsehoods, hoaxes and conspiracy theories on TikTok has grown along with the platform. Best known for its short-form viral videos, TikTok is popular with kids and teens and has at least 100 million users in the U.S.

Starting last year TikTok took a series of steps to curb QAnon and TikTok said it would remove misinformation about COVID-19 and vaccines.

Liberal media watchdog group Media Matters recently reported that TikTok's recommendation algorithm was steering users to extremist accounts such as QAnon and militias like The Three Percenters and the Oath Keepers.

TikTok said it removed the accounts and content cited in the Media Matters report.

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