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Analysis of Social Media Platforms' Response 100 Days After US Supreme Court Decision Overturning Roe V. Wade

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Content warning

This report contains mentions of: abortion and miscarriage, distorted and graphic depictions of the abortion process, sex trafficking, Holocaust denial, genocide, slavery, and murder.

About this publication

October 2, 2022, marked 100 days since the US Supreme Court's ruling on *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, the decision that overturned the landmark cases *Roe v. Wade* (1973) and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992), and upended guaranteed access to abortion.

In this report, ISD assesses four major social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok) on two critical levels regarding abortion misinformation: one, whether their policies are fit for purpose, contain any loopholes, or need to be more specific about abortion-related misinformation; and two, whether the enforcement of any existing abortion-related misinformation policies was consistent and effective, with a focus on the time period of June 24, 2022, to October 2, 2022. ISD also provides policy recommendations for platforms navigating the post-Roe information sphere, and highlights the importance of coordinated fact-checking and information sharing efforts.

The findings of this report show that online platforms have largely failed to create an environment that makes it safe for Americans to access accurate information needed to make critical health care decisions.



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Executive Summary

October 2, 2022 marked 100 days since the US Supreme Court's ruling on *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, the decision that overturned the landmark cases *Roe v. Wade* (1973) and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992), and upended guaranteed access to abortion.

As Americans seek answers on their access to care, medical experts have expressed "worry" about the role misinformation could play in jeopardizing the health of people seeking care. Previous ISD research shows that online platforms were ill-prepared or simply lacking abortion misinformation policies in the anticipated leadup to the *Dobbs* ruling.

This report examines how that failure to close loopholes, or create abortion-related misinformation policies, combined with already inconsistent application and enforcement content moderation systems and processes, have resulted in an online information environment where misinformation continues to go unchecked and unchallenged.

In doing so, this report assesses four major social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and TikTok) on two critical levels:

1. Whether their policies are fit for purpose, contain any loopholes, or need to be more specific about abortion-related misinformation;
2. Whether the enforcement of any existing abortion-related misinformation policies was consistent and effective, with a focus on the time period of June 24 2022 to October 2 2022.

ISD's findings show that online platforms have largely failed to create an environment that makes it safe for Americans to access accurate information needed to make critical health care decisions.

From June 24 to October 2, ISD found that only YouTube took specific steps to prevent and counter misinformation specifically about abortion. Even so, YouTube's policies are not comprehensive enough and contain loopholes when it comes to some of YouTube's features (such as YouTube Shorts). In fact, ISD analysts identified actors taking advantage of these loopholes and evading moderation.

TikTok released a statement on September 28 as an update to its misinformation policy. This statement briefly mentions the platform does not allow abortion misinformation, but this is still not reflected in the company's "integrity policies" (which cover misinformation). As for Instagram and Facebook, no public statement has been made regarding abortion-related misinformation policies, and these platforms do not seem to have made efforts to close loopholes or specify within their health misinformation policies how abortion-related misinformation would be tackled.

This inaction not only has an immediate impact on the health and well-being of Americans, but calls into question once again the ability or willingness of online platforms to respond to future issues which may be vulnerable to misinformation.

Key Findings

Content containing abortion misinformation or misleading claims about abortion was still present on all four platforms in the 100 days after the ruling.

- More than 11% of the content posted by 39 pages analyzed on Instagram included language misconstruing abortion procedures and the safety of abortion. These posts obtained more than 1.2M interactions in total and were shared by 22 pages with a total followership of over 1.37M.
- Actors spreading misinformation about abortion, access, procedure and care are using old and debunked narratives to disparage facilities that provide abortions, especially Planned Parenthood.
- YouTube videos misconstruing abortion procedures and safety that are marked with informational labels leading users to credible information about abortion on the platform are circulating on TikTok without any informational label, meaning users on TikTok are not afforded the same access to credible information.
- Analysts identified 55 posts on Facebook promoting the abortion pill “reversal,” posted after June 24. In total, the posts received 1,145 shares and 3,959 interactions.

An analysis of Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok’s responses to the June 24 Dobbs decision revealed that only YouTube updated their existing policies to specifically include abortion misinformation and promotion of harmful products related to abortion.

- In a September 28 [announcement about misinformation](#) on the platform, TikTok claimed on they do not allow abortion misinformation, but did not update their policies.
- None of these platforms properly address how they handle exaggerated and inaccurate depictions of abortion (whether through text or imagery) in their policies.

Policies that do exist (under health misinformation policies, policies against graphic imagery, etc.) are not properly enforced when it comes to abortion-related content.

- ISD analysts identified YouTube Shorts, a short-form video-sharing platform created by YouTube in 2020, to be a blind spot in YouTube’s moderation and upholding of platform policies.
- While Facebook and Instagram have a policy against graphic imagery, which includes adding “sensitive” labels of imagery of fetuses in an abortion context, analysts did not observe any of these labels being applied.
- In the few instances that fact-checking labels were applied to the 4,998 Facebook posts analyzed, the labels were applied inconsistently and, in some instances, erroneously.

Glossary

Disinformation

Disinformation is false, misleading or manipulated content presented as fact, that is intended to deceive or harm.

Misinformation

Misinformation is false, misleading or manipulated content presented as fact, irrespective of an intent to deceive.

Monetization

Monetization describes the process of earning revenue from content. This can take a variety of forms, including advertising revenue, merchandising, donations, subscriptions, affiliate marketing, paid promotions and sponsorship, among others.

Abortion Care¹

Abortion care refers to the health care people receive from medical professionals during and after an abortion procedure.

1. This definition is based on the [National Library of Medicine](#) and the [American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologist's](#) explanations and definitions of abortion procedures and postabortion care.

Platform Abortion-Related Speech Policies Since June 24

No platform has taken comprehensive action to set up and enforce abortion misinformation policy since the *Dobbs* decision. Comprehensive policies, and the consistent enforcement of such policies, would mean less unchecked abortion misinformation would have been found across all four platforms.

On July 20, YouTube [announced](#) it would start removing content providing instructions for unsafe abortion methods and content promoting false claims about the safety of abortion. The platform said it would ramp up this policy “over the next few weeks” and that it would launch an information label under abortion-related videos. It also updated its “misinformation policies” page to include these statements. However, in ISD’s [previous report](#) on abortion misinformation, analysts [observed](#) that the policy was applied inconsistently on videos, especially in contexts outside of the US and the English-speaking world.

In July, NewsGuard [identified](#) videos promoting harmful abortion alternatives on TikTok. In response to NewsGuard’s findings, the platform promised to remove content that promoted “herbal abortions.” Yet, two months later, videos promoting unsafe abortion techniques [were found](#) on the platform.

On September 28, TikTok [announced](#) they do not allow medical misinformation about abortion. Yet, in a review of the platform’s misinformation policy, analysts did not identify a specific clause addressing abortion. Apart from their September 28 announcement, TikTok has announced nothing further on the issue.

Meta platforms Facebook and Instagram did not publicly announce any policy change after the SCOTUS decision. Neither of these platforms explicitly mention abortion in their misinformation policies.

In the days after June 24, “pro-choice” accounts on Instagram and Facebook [started noticing](#) their posts about abortion pills or posts directing users to resources were being flagged or removed by Meta. Meta spokesperson Andy Stone [claimed](#) these were instances of “incorrect enforcement,” and in a [statement to WIRED](#) said the company “had not changed its moderation policies” after *Dobbs* and was “working on a fix” for these instances. Since then, there has been no statement or update made suggesting Meta has fortified its policies and enforcement approaches surrounding abortion.

A full summary of misinformation policies from each platform can be found below.

Policies	Facebook	Instagram	YouTube	TikTok
Does the platform have a specific policy on abortion misinformation?	<p>No. Facebook only <u>removes</u> health misinformation that may cause "imminent harm" or spreads false claims during a "public health emergency."</p> <p>Facebook also has a <u>policy</u> against graphic imagery, which claims it includes "sensitive" labels of imagery of fetuses in an abortion context.</p>	<p>No. Instagram does not have specific misinformation policies outside of COVID-19. Like Facebook, Instagram <u>partners</u> with third-party fact-checkers to flag misinformation.</p> <p>The platform also has the same policy as Facebook for graphic imagery.</p>	<p>Yes. YouTube added a clause to its <u>misinformation policy</u> on July 20 banning "content that contradicts local health authorities' or WHO guidance" on the safety of "chemical and surgical abortion."</p> <p>YouTube also <u>committed</u> to adding information labels to abortion-related videos.</p>	<p>No. TikTok's integrity policies ban content containing "Medical misinformation that can cause harm to an individual's physical health," but does not specify abortion.</p> <p>However, on September 28, TikTok stated they <u>do not allow</u> medical misinformation about abortion. The integrity policy has yet to be updated to reflect TikTok's statement.</p>
Does the platform have a policy against content advocating or promoting dangerous products that can be used to either cause or prevent an abortion (e.g. abortion pill "reversal," natural remedies to have an abortion)?	<p>No. Facebook only has a <u>clause</u> in its misinformation policy banning posts "promoting or advocating for harmful miracle cures" that may contribute to the risk of "serious injury" or death.</p>	<p>No. Instagram's <u>Community Guidelines</u> links to Meta policy on "Restricted Goods and Services," which does not mention any abortion-related products.</p>	<p>Yes. YouTube's policy bans the promotion of "alternative abortion methods" (with no mention of abortion pill "reversal"), but the <u>advertising policy</u> <u>does not mention</u> these alternative methods nor misinformation about abortion procedures being banned from ads.</p>	<p>No. TikTok only has policies against the monetization of dangerous abortion products (i.e. branded contents and ads), but not general content on the platform.</p>
Has the platform made efforts to update policies or close loopholes after the Dobbs ruling?	No.	No.	Yes.	No. TikTok's September 28 statement claims the platform does not allow abortion misinformation, but the integrity policy (TikTok's version of a misinformation policy) does not reflect this.
Did ISD analysis identify content spreading abortion misinformation on the platform?	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.

Instagram

ISD analysts conducted an analysis of Instagram posts published by 39 anti-abortion pages from June 24 2022 to October 3 2022. These 2,002 posts were found to have received over 6.48M interactions in the timeframe. Analysts identified a variety of issues connected to content about abortion on Instagram, including the promotion of dangerous anti-abortion remedies, unchecked misinformation and conspiratorial narratives, use of graphic language to describe abortions, and fact-check labeling being applied inconsistently or erroneously.

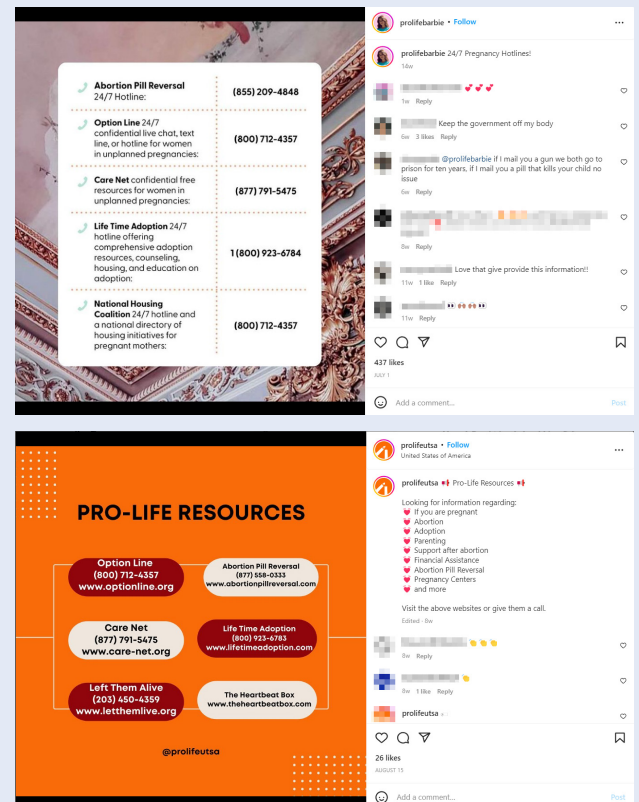
Methodology

Using Beam, an information threat analysis environment developed by ISD and CASM Technology, ISD analysts collected all posts published by 39 pre-selected self-defined “pro-life” pages on Instagram and 100 self-defined “pro-life” pages and groups on Facebook from 24 June 2022 to 3 October 2022. This collection resulted in 2,002 Instagram posts and 23,279 Facebook posts. Given the high number of Facebook posts, these were filtered for content including keywords connected to abortion, resulting in a total of 4,988 posts.

Harmful Health Misinformation

As identified in a [previous report](#) by ISD, content promoting abortion “reversal” services still persists on Instagram. The “treatment,” which promises to reverse the effects of an abortion pill, has been [described](#) by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) as “not based on science” and does not meet clinical standards. Although Meta does have a policy against [harmful health misinformation](#), the platform has been [found to repeatedly](#) fail to tackle content promoting the abortion pill “reversal.”

Figure 1: Two posts on Instagram were found to be promoting abortion pill “reversal” services without any fact-checking label or link providing reliable sources. These two posts obtained 384 interactions in total.



Misleading Claims About Abortion Providers

Analysts found numerous posts containing misleading claims about clinics that provide abortions. A recurring narrative spread both in the form of memes and more seriously framed claims is that clinics push people to have abortions in order to harvest and/or sell fetuses, their organs or their limbs. Although these claims have widely been debunked for years, none of these posts were accompanied by a fact-checking label from the platform.

A total of 84 posts in the dataset mentioned Planned Parenthood and contained misleading claims about the organization. Six of the posts pushed the narrative that Planned Parenthood is a racist institution aimed at “eliminating the black community.” These claims originate from the fact that the founder of Planned Parenthood, Margaret Sanger, was in fact a supporter of eugenics, an ideology which is both racist and ableist. The organization has publicly acknowledged its problematic history and distanced itself from this ideology, but “pro-life” organizations have nevertheless continued to repeat this narrative.

Another narrative identified in the dataset claimed that Planned Parenthood “enables sex trafficking.” Most of the posts pushing this narrative came from Live Action, a self-defined “pro-life” organization. Live Action filmed undercover videos in at least 12 Planned Parenthood locations in 2011, with actors posing as sex traffickers and underage sex workers. The centers contacted the FBI to alert them of potential sex trafficking of minors, but one employee was filmed to be complicit and was later fired by Planned Parenthood for their behavior. While Planned Parenthood quickly and publicly condemned the employee’s actions, the video still reemerges online as proof that “the abortion industry” as a whole enables sex trafficking and can still be found on platforms. While this content is not violative of current policies, it falls into a grey area for content containing misinformation.

Figure 2: Posts by “pro-life” pages claiming Planned Parenthood sells organs and “fetus parts”.

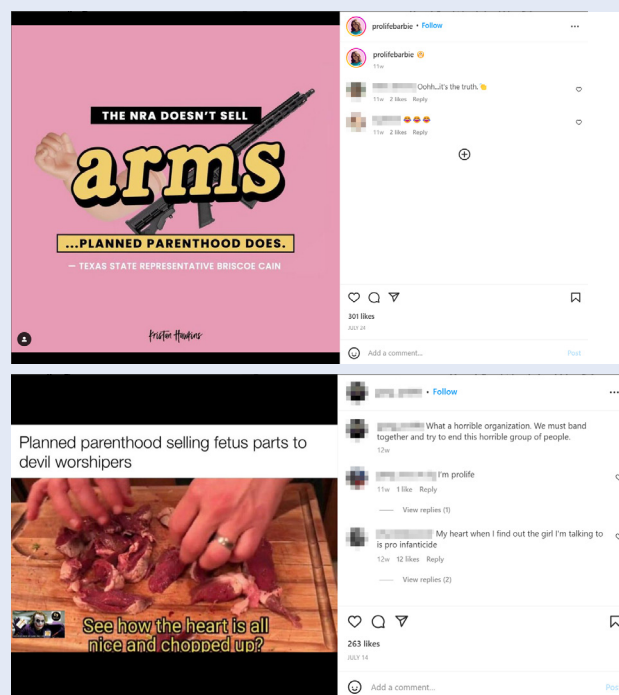


Figure 3: A post on Instagram claims that Planned Parenthood is “fighting to eliminate the Black community” with no informational label applied.



Misinformation Featuring Graphic Language

More than 11% of the content posted by the 39 pages on Instagram included language misconstruing what an abortion is and how safe the procedures are. These posts obtained more than 1.2M interactions in total and were shared by 22 pages with a total followership of over 1.37M. In these posts, terminating a pregnancy was described as “killing,” “murdering,” “dismembering a baby,” or homicide.

Fact-Check Labeling

A small number of posts in the dataset were found to include fact-checking labels; however, labels were found not to be applied consistently or in some cases appropriately. A post published by Live Action features a label stating that the post contains partly false information. Two other posts published by Students for Live Action were obscured and contain fact-checking by USA Today with more information about the claims made. The post features a meme stating “If abortion is only 3% of what Planned Parenthood does... Then why are abortion facilities closing down completely when abortion bans are put in place?” The fact check label featured on the post states that in reality no clinics have closed since Roe v. Wade was overturned, yet, the post remains up. Other posts making the same claims with slightly different wording were found not to include fact check labels, highlighting gaps in the implementation of labels on false claims.

Another case of mislabeling was found in a post published by the “pro-life” page Pro Life Utah. The post mentions HPV vaccines and was therefore incorrectly flagged as content including COVID-19 information, generating an automatic link to COVID-19 vaccine resources.

Figure 4: A post by Live Action claiming Planned Parenthood “murder[s] 1,000 children each day” and “help sex traffickers,” and a post by Human Coalition claiming abortion enables “sex trafficking.”



Figure 5: A post by Live Action making false claims about when abortion is needed and comparing abortion to murder.



Figure 6: The post above includes a label warning that the post contains partly false information.

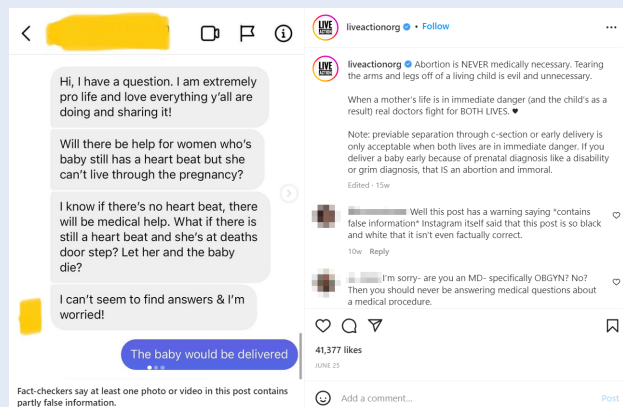


Figure 8: A post featuring the same false claim does not feature a fact-checking label.

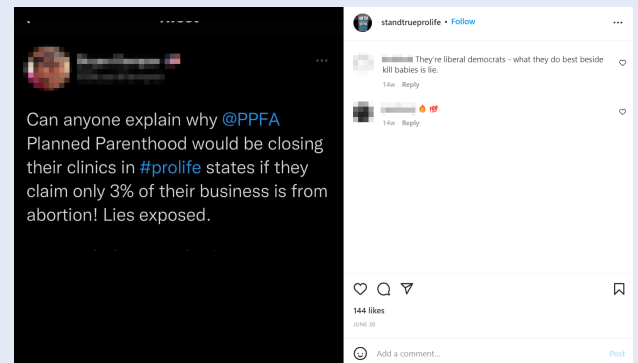


Figure 7: The three images above feature a post by Students for Life Action which includes a fact check label by USA TODAY.

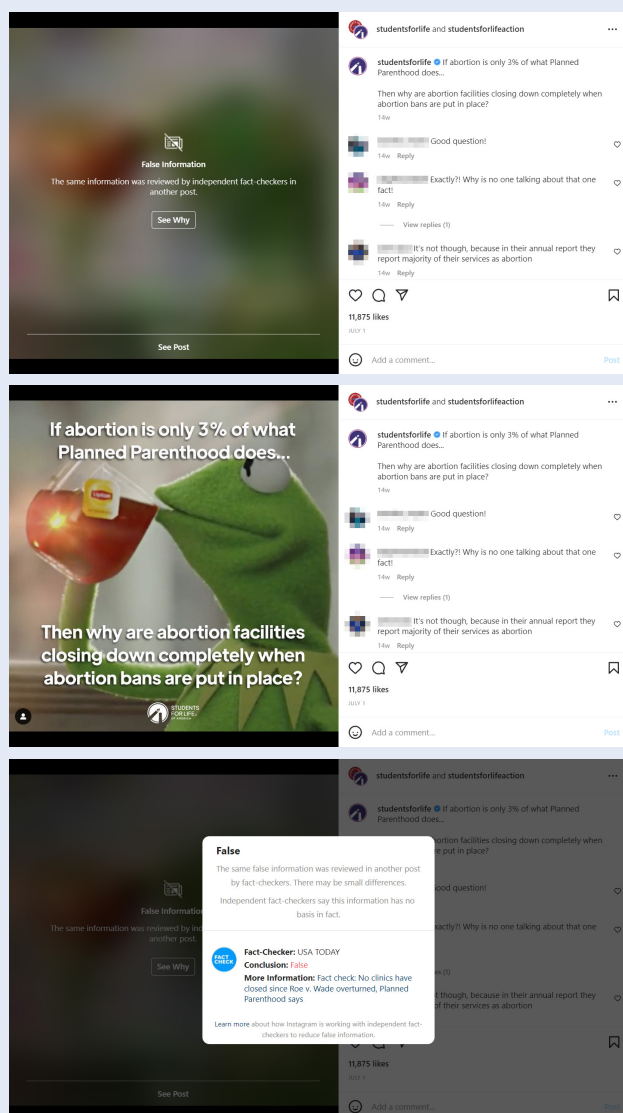
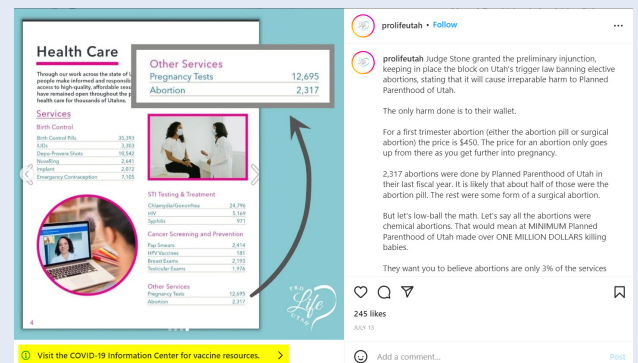


Figure 9: The post above was incorrectly labeled as containing information about COVID-19. The post also compares abortion to slaughter.



Facebook

ISD analysts retrieved all posts published by 100 Facebook pages and groups between June 24 2022 and October 3 2022. The posts were filtered for content mentioning abortion, resulting in a total of 4,988 posts which were shared over 160K times and received more than 1.5M interactions in the time frame analyzed.

Similar to the results found on Instagram, analysts identified shortcomings in Facebook's moderation of content related to abortion which include unchecked claims, inconsistent and erroneous automatic fact check and informational labeling, and the persistence of misinformation featuring graphic language or promoting abortion pill "reversal" services.

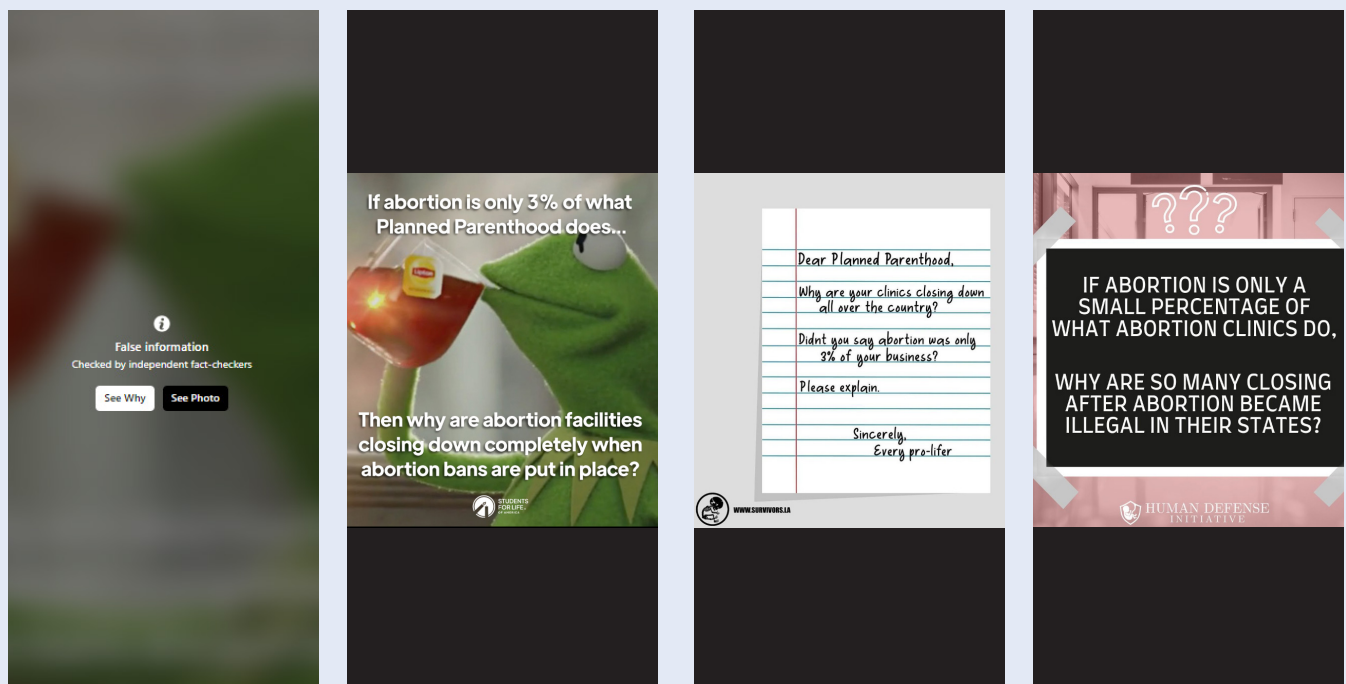
Abortion Pill "Reversal"

ISD identified 55 posts promoting the previously mentioned abortion pill "reversal." While it is unclear whether this "treatment" would fall under Facebook's "harmful cures" policy, none of the posts included a warning of the danger of this unproven treatment nor a fact-checking label. The posts received 1,145 shares and 3,959 interactions.

Figure 10: One of the posts promoting abortion pill "reversal" with 44 shares.



Figure 11: Out of all posts making the claim that clinics have been closing after the overturning of Roe v Wade, only the post featuring Kermit the Frog included a fact-checking label.



Labels Applied Inconsistently and Erroneously

Out of all of the posts manually checked by ISD analysts, only three of them were found to include a label; however, the labels were found to be applied inconsistently and, in some cases, erroneously.

A post similar to the one found on Instagram claiming that Planned Parenthood clinics had been shut in states where Roe v. Wade was overturned was also found on Facebook. In total, five posts were found to be making the same claim; however, only two of them included a label stating that the post included false information whereas the other three did not. Other posts which included mentions of vaccines were incorrectly labeled as containing information about COVID-19 and included more information about vaccine resources, but no information about abortion.

Misleading Claims About Abortion Providers

Analysts also found numerous "pro-life" Facebook pages containing claims aimed at presenting Planned Parenthood and abortion facilities as racist institutions whose goal is to eliminate minorities and the Black

Figure 12: A post mentioning vaccines was incorrectly labeled as containing information about COVID-19.

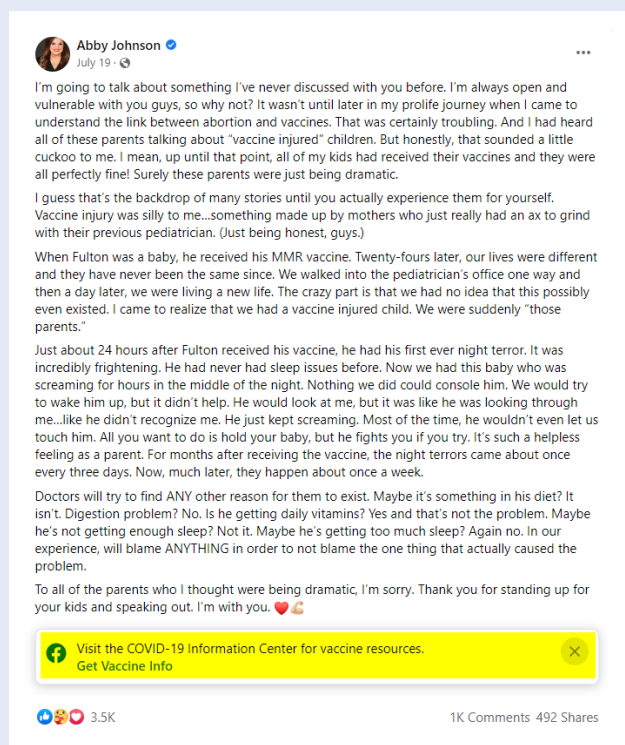


Figure 13: The posts above appear to be targeting minorities with conspiratorial claims aimed at presenting the abortion industry and Planned Parenthood as racist institutions.



community in particular. Content making these claims used the history of Planned Parenthood's founder to legitimize these allegations, and some of the content contained racist symbols. A post featuring a swastika misleadingly presented statistics on the number of abortions among the Black community as "proof" that Planned Parenthood is targeting minorities. Other posts compared the abortion industry to the white supremacist group the Ku Klux Klan, stating that "the abortion industry kills as many Black people every four days as the Klan killed in 150 years."

More posts spreading unchecked information on Facebook included claims that "women are pressured into abortions so universities can study harvested organs." This claim was initially made by anti-abortion attorney Mike Seibel on a podcast episode of The Van Maren Show and then picked up by the ultraconservative website LifeSiteNews. Facebook removed the LifeSiteNews page in 2021 for violating misinformation policies by posting misleading COVID-19 information. Despite the ban on its page, content from the website is still being spread on the platform unchecked, including content containing misleading claims.

Misinformation Featuring Graphic Language

Of the 4,988 posts published by the self-defined "pro-life" pages and groups, 12.9% of them included graphic language to describe abortion. These pages and groups described abortion procedures as killing, murdering, dismembering, or starving children. While platforms typically do not prohibit the use of graphic language in their community guidelines, it is worth considering the impact of this language in reference to abortion on the ability of users to access neutral and credible public health information on the platform.

Figure 14: A post linking an article from LifeSiteNews claims that people are pressured into abortions so universities can study harvested organs.

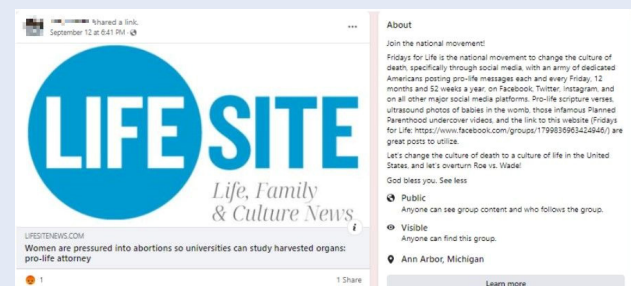


Figure 15: One of the posts that was shared from a "pro-life" page to a "pro-life" group uses inflammatory language to describe a dilation and evacuation abortion.²



2. According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, "dismemberment" is "intentional use of inflammatory, emotional language."

YouTube

Methodology

ISD analysts reviewed the top YouTube search results – filtered by view count and date uploaded – for five keywords, in order to see if they contained content that violated YouTube’s new abortion-specific policies. Keywords used included: abortion, “abortion pill,” “abortion pill reversal,” “abortion is genocide,” and “abortion organ harvesting.” Results revealed gaps in YouTube’s policy implementation and included numerous videos that promoted harmful or misleading content on abortion.

Gaps in YouTube Policy Implementation

As mentioned above, YouTube has taken critical steps to mitigate the spread of harmful or misleading content about abortion on its platform, including applying informational labels that direct users to credible information on abortion, promoting videos from “health sources,” and stating that it will remove content that “provides instructions for unsafe abortion methods or promotes false claims about abortion safety under our medical misinformation policies.” For example, when a user searches “abortion pill,” filtered by Relevance (the default search), the “abortion health information” label appears above search results, followed by an informative Planned Parenthood video explaining the process of medication abortion, and a banner reading “from health sources” which is followed by videos on medication abortion.

However, not all of the videos under the “from health sources” banner are from credible health sources. A video by Focus on the Family, a religious “pro-life” organization, flagged in ISD’s [previous report](#) for containing misinformation on medication abortion is the eighth video listed. The video, posted on June 5 2021, has 52.6k views, 777 likes, and 222 comments – some made as recently as September 2022. The video frames medication abortion as painful and widely regretted and claims that it can be reversed, promoting “abortionpillreversal.com” in its description.

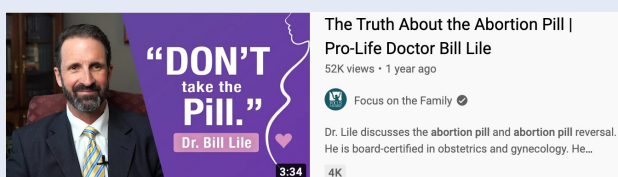
Furthermore, the informational label applied across abortion-related content on YouTube is broad, and not specific to the claims made in relevant videos or descriptions. The label reads: “An abortion is a procedure to end a pregnancy. It uses medicine or surgery to remove the embryo or fetus and placenta from the uterus. The procedure is done by a licensed healthcare professional.” In the US, the label also links to [MedlinePlus](#), which provides a credible summary of abortion procedures, urges those considering abortion to consult their healthcare provider, and lists other resources on concerns individuals considering an abortion might have (most of which are available in English and Spanish).

YouTube Shorts

While most videos identified by analysts as containing harmful or misleading content about abortion include the informational label, the label was not applied to any “Shorts” about abortion. Previous ISD research on online misogyny has also found moderation of YouTube Shorts to be lacking in comparison to the rest of the platform. YouTube [Shorts](#) are 60-second-or-less videos uploaded to YouTube that users can scroll through vertically. Users can like, comment on, and share Shorts across other platforms (when a user clicks the “share” button on a Short, they are given an option to copy a link to the Short or share it on one of 12 different platforms, with just one click).

A Short by Ben Shapiro titled, “Ben Shapiro on Abortion: Evil Is Still Evil Regardless of Politics” is the second most-viewed result under a search for “abortion.” Standing at 16M views, it calls abortion evil and compares “pro-life” activists to people protesting slavery, equating slavery with abortion. Despite the title referencing “abortion” and the video clearly discussing abortion, it has no informational label and users are not directed to any credible information on the topic. Analysts also found two Shorts that claim abortion is “Black genocide,” promoting unproven and harmful abortion pill reversal methods, and claiming that abortion is linked to organ harvesting. Neither of these Shorts had any form of informational label or links to credible information. Both of these Shorts were also uploaded after YouTube’s abortion policies went into effect, posted in mid and late September 2022.

Figure 16: A screenshot of the Focus on the Family video discussing the abortion pill and abortion pill “reversal.”



Misleading or Harmful Content on Abortion Still Accessible on YouTube

Many of the videos flagged in the [previous report](#) as containing harmful or misleading content about abortion remain accessible as of October 4 2022. These videos are also listed in search results for keywords, especially when results are filtered by view count. Similar to the Instagram and Facebook content, many of the videos promote the abortion pill “reversal” and claim that Planned Parenthood “harvests” organs from aborted fetuses.³ Each of these videos included YouTube’s standard informational label on abortion, which does not include information debunking these specific misleading or harmful claims.

New videos on these topics have been uploaded since YouTube’s policy on abortion content went into effect. A video promoting abortion pill “reversal” posted on October 3 has 2.8k views, 129 likes, and five comments as of October 4. Another video promoting abortion pill “reversal” was posted on September 28 by an alleged “pregnancy information center.” Again, a video claiming that abortion is linked to organ harvesting was posted on October 1. These videos did include the informational label, but the label did not include information on the harms of abortion pill “reversal” methods.

Recently uploaded Shorts containing misinformation without any informational label included: a Short posted on October 3 promoting abortion pill “reversal,” without an informational label or credible resources; a Short claiming that a university was harvesting organs of “children [dismembered] in the womb”, posted in August; and two Shorts that claim abortion is “Black genocide.” Each of these Shorts were uploaded between August and early October, after YouTube’s abortion policies went into effect.

- Other videos include a Focus on the Family video that frames medication abortion as unsafe; a Forbes segment in which Rep. Madison Cawthorne (R-NC) refers to abortion as genocide; a video from EWTN that deems “the womb” the “most dangerous place for African Americans;” the LaBrant family abortion “documentary” which compares abortion to the Holocaust (and remains the 11th most viewed video under the search term “abortion”); and a Live Action video that frames medication abortion as unsafe, refers to a fetus as “a baby who dies inside the mother’s womb,” and states that “killing a baby at any stage of pregnancy, for any reason, is wrong.”

Figure 17: The second most-viewed result when searching for “abortion” on YouTube.

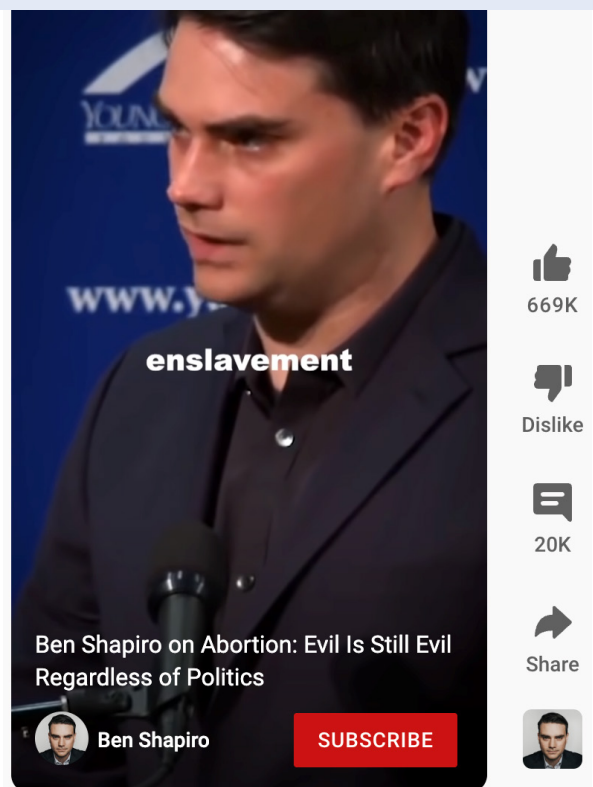
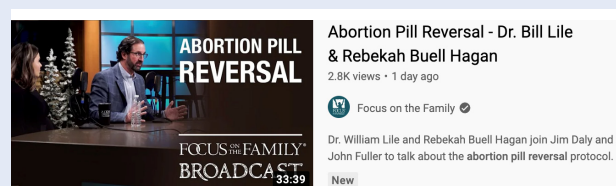


Figure 18: A Live Action video framing medication abortion as unsafe, published 6 years ago. The video now includes an informational label.



Figure 19: A recently-uploaded video by Focus on the Family discussing the abortion pill “reversal.”



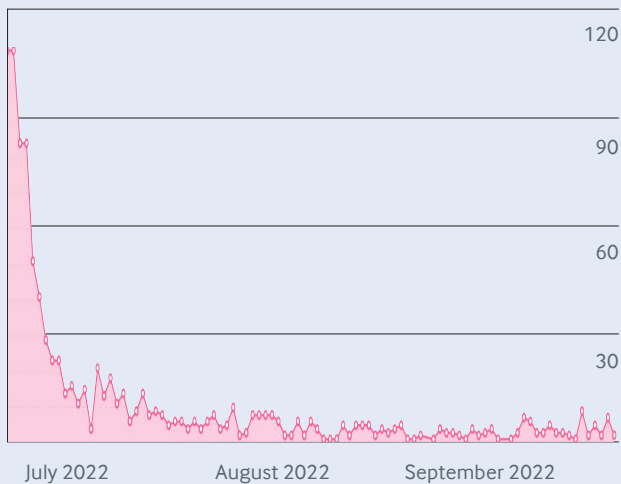
TikTok

Methodology

In partnership with ViralMoment, a TikTok intelligence tool, ISD researchers analyzed a sample of 3,893 TikTok videos compiled using hashtag searches. The TikTok analysis used the hashtags: #roevwadehasgottogo, #overturnroevwade, #antiabortion, #abortionkills, #banabortion, #endabortion, and #prolife. The ViralMoment tool pulled the top liked videos from these hashtags, regardless of date posted. The tool uses AI and computer vision to read data points including but not limited to: hashtags, transcript, text on screen or video, captions, etc. This data is then made searchable and reportable. No account is created and no algorithm bias is introduced.

TikTok Findings

Figure 20: The figure shows the number of videos posted on TikTok with the hashtags #roevwadehasgottogo, #overturnroevwade, #antiabortion, #abortionkills, #banabortion, #endabortion, and #prolife from June 24 to October 3 2022.



In the first week after the US Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade, there was a significant spike in discussion about abortion on TikTok. While the number of videos posted that used one or more of these key hashtags averaged one to ten per day, 110 videos were uploaded on both June 24 and 25. As shown, the number of videos posted that use one or more of these hashtags has decreased to between 5 and 10 per day since mid-August.

The main accounts driving the conversation in the dataset between June 24 and October 3 were @equalrightsinstitute (16.9k followers), @prolifetn (13.4k followers), and @secular_pro_life (5.4k followers). These accounts were already identified as top drivers of conversation prior to the Dobbs decision, and have continued to post content without restriction since then.

As identified in ISD's [previous report](#), @equalrightsinstitute continues to claim that abortion restrictions benefit women, even arguing that portraying abortion as a healthcare issue is [misogynistic](#). Using the hashtag #prolifeprowoman, @equalrightsinstitute and other accounts continue to frame "pro-choice" men as misogynist and push the narrative that a lot of people regret their abortions. Accounts like @secular_pro_life argue that stigmatizing abortion is important to free people from the "pressure" to abort," and @achanceoflife claimed abortion is the ultimate "exploitation of women."

Another narrative identified claimed "pro-choice" narratives and physicians are ableist or biased against people with disabilities. The account @secular_pro_life argues that ableism was a factor that leads professionals to suggest abortions to pregnant women. Related to this narrative, other accounts shared conspiratorial claims that portray abortion as an instrument of [eugenics](#), as genocide or even comparing it to [the Holocaust](#).

As identified on Facebook, other "pro-life" accounts also claimed abortion aims to target vulnerable populations based on race and/or nationality, especially trying to "wipe out" the black community. To support this claim, they used the history of Planned Parenthood's founder, donations made to this organization or even compared [abortion to slavery](#).

@prolifetn also shared misinformation regarding the [abortion pill "reversal."](#) None of the posts included a warning of the risks of this unproven treatment. As TikTok has no official misinformation policy addressing abortion (apart from their September 28 announcement), most videos are unlabeled on the platform, even when the same content is labeled on other platforms. For example, a TikTok posted by the account on September 17 is originally from Live Action's YouTube channel. The video on YouTube has an informational label, and the video itself is graphic and exaggerates the abortion procedure. Yet, on TikTok, users are not redirected to correct information.

Figure 21: Screenshots of a video posted by ProLifeTN's TikTok comparing abortion to the Holocaust.

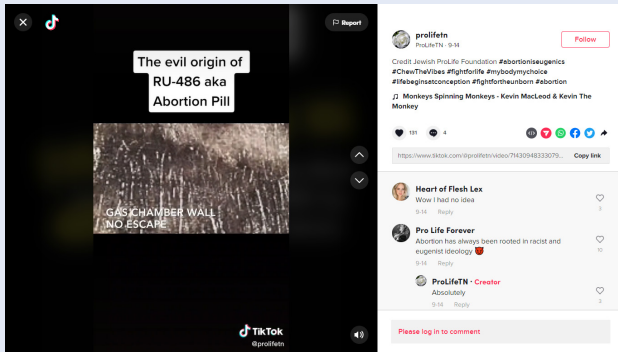
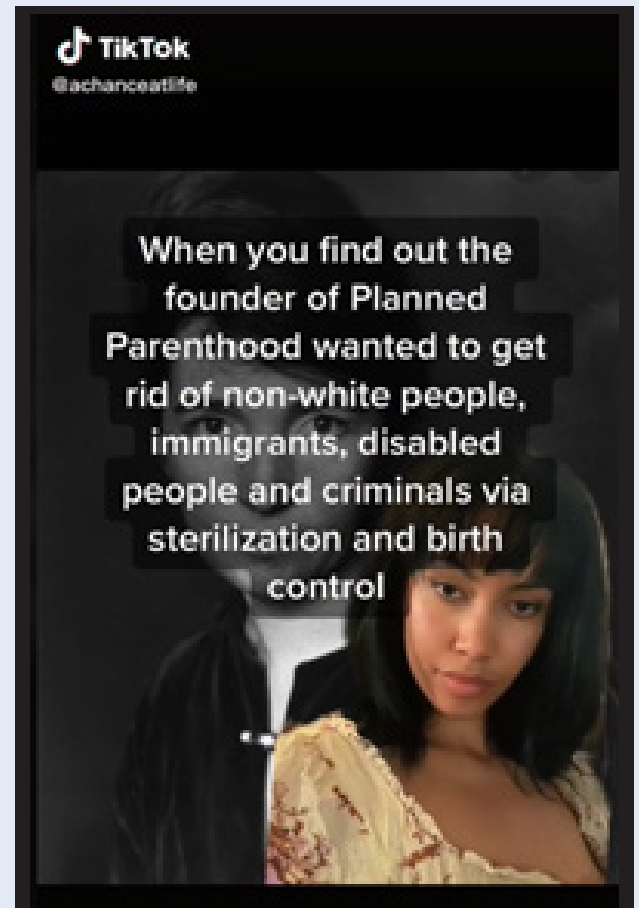


Figure 22: Screenshots of a video by @achanceatlife on TikTok claiming Planned Parenthood targets specific communities.



Policy Recommendations

This report explored the misinformation policies of Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok in two ways: whether the policies are fit for preventing abortion-specific misinformation, and whether policies that exist that would include abortion misinformation (i.e., health misinformation and policies against graphic imagery) are properly enforced. The table below includes policy recommendations for each platform divided in the aforementioned two ways.

While the policy recommendations are listed by platform, in order to properly address the post-Dobbs information landscape online, platforms need to comprehensively address and enforce these issues in a coordinated effort to slow the spread of cross-platform misinformation.

YouTube's efforts are not as effective if content that is labeled on YouTube spreads on TikTok and Facebook with no label (and vice versa). Additionally, misinformation with graphic language across all platforms not only creates confusion for users but also subtly creates a justification for violence – especially when combined with content containing information about doctors or centers providing abortion care.

Finally, it is crucial that platforms policies and enforcement of these policies also cover non-English language content or English-language content accessed from a non-English speaking country, as abortion misinformation and misleading content about abortion affects users globally.

	Facebook	Instagram	YouTube	TikTok
Recommendations for ensuring policies are fit for purpose	<p>Add a specific clause in the health misinformation policy to include statements misleading users about what abortion is. Lack of proper information can ultimately lead to imminent harm for people seeking abortion care.</p> <p>Strengthen policy against graphic imagery, specifically addressing language and exaggerated, inaccurate depictions of abortion that may unnecessarily create fear amongst users and potentially encourage harm against abortion providers.</p>	<p>Develop a more robust misinformation policy outside of just COVID-19 misinformation.</p> <p>Instagram users are younger, and being exposed to misleading information about abortion can be detrimental.</p> <p>See Facebook column for recommendation for graphic imagery.</p>	<p>Promote more useful information upfront in the information label, such as statements attesting to the safety of abortion.</p> <p>Develop a different label for videos that promote harmful alternatives or abortion pill "reversal."</p> <p>Remove misleading videos that use graphic imagery (including realistic cartoons) to describe abortion procedures.</p>	<p>Update misinformation policy to include abortion misinformation and misleading claims about the abortion pill.</p> <p>Implement a labelling system for videos that discuss abortions, directing users to credible information.</p> <p>Add policy addressing the harms of abortion alternatives and the abortion pill "reversal."</p>
Recommendations for enforcement of policies	<p>Consistently add fact-checking labels or remove content that spreads misinformation or violates policy.</p> <p>Thoroughly add "sensitive" labels to graphic imagery of abortion procedures, especially if the content misconstrues what the procedure is.</p>	<p>Ensure users have access to correct and updated information about abortion by labelling or inserting more warning labels on content.</p> <p>Apply all policies to all platform features such as Instagram Reels or Instagram Stories.</p>	<p>Apply abortion-specific policies to newer platform features such as YouTube Shorts, which currently do not have any information label despite videos found clearly discussing abortion (in different capacities).</p> <p>Expand moderation capacities to non-English language countries, and ensure English-language videos are still labeled when accessed from a non-English speaking country.</p>	<p>Provide more transparency on videos that have been removed, according to the September 28 statement.</p> <p>Provide context in videos that make claims that Planned Parenthood or abortion providers are racist, and remove videos that compare abortion to the Holocaust.</p>

Conclusion

This report set out to evaluate updates in platform policies after the Supreme Court's decision on *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* on June 24 2022. ISD found that the only mainstream social media platform that has made strides towards preventing and countering misinformation about abortion was YouTube; none of the other three platforms analyzed have updated their policies to support users in a post-Dobbs environment.

While YouTube's informational label is a step in the right direction, as the label itself is the first (and sometimes only) resource that users will see, more useful information than a basic definition of abortion should be promoted upfront, such as statements attesting to the safety of medication and surgical abortion. The resource the label links to, MedlinePlus, also does not include content explaining misleading or harmful content on abortion, such as promotions of abortion pill "reversal."

Furthermore, even with YouTube's efforts, analysts still identified problematic content and inconsistent application of the new policy, especially with YouTube Shorts – a feature that seems to be a blind spot in YouTube moderation.

YouTube cannot be the only platform attempting to tackle the issue of abortion misinformation if meaningful progress is to be made. Coordination and information sharing between platforms and fact-checking partners on mis- and disinformation policy is critical, especially in a time of uncertainty and confusion. This can be shown with the example of the TikTok user easily reposting YouTube videos containing abortion misinformation, that are flagged on the YouTube website, without any informational label transferring over. Just as Facebook and Instagram flag every post identified as containing the word "vaccine" with a COVID-19 vaccine informational label, similar policies must be put in place by each platform for the topic of abortion.

Abortion misinformation is also not a country-specific problem. Platform policies, in theory, are applied globally and should aim to protect users across the world. While this report did not focus on non-English language misinformation, platforms must also consider the different contexts and countries where abortion-related disinformation is likely also causing harm, and ensure sufficient resources are devoted to enforcing their policies equitably and consistently outside the US.

The narratives observed across all four platforms in the 100 days after *Dobbs* are not new – they are rooted in debunked, unproven narratives that have always been a problem. In reality, platforms should have had stronger policies long before *Dobbs* was even on the Supreme Court's radar. Now, with *Roe* and *Casey* being overturned, the environment online has changed. Access to correct information in this era is even more important than before, given the rapidly-changing laws around abortion. For it is one thing if users are being misled by abortion misinformation online, but it is another if it leads to people to make dangerous decisions about their healthcare.

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