

# **SPECTRUM NEWS 1**

## **YouTube's suspension of Rand Paul sparks debate on role of social media in battle against misinformation**

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Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY) has long contradicted health experts by claiming cloth masks are ineffective in limiting the spread of the coronavirus. After making that claim in a video on YouTube last week, he was tossed off the platform for a week. YouTube said it violated the site's ban on misinformation.

Paul firing back, describing it as "a badge of honor," tweeting, "Leftwing cretins at YouTube banning me for 7 days for a video that quotes 2 peer reviewed articles saying cloth masks don't work."

Lisa Macpherson, a policy expert at Public Knowledge, an organization promoting freedom of expression online, said she understands why the video sharing site made that call.

"Public Knowledge has done a lot of research and tracking on how all of the digital platforms managed the onslaught of misinformation about COVID-19," Macpherson said. "One of the things that we learned, unfortunately, is information online can have real world harms. People can get hurt. They can die."

Public health experts across the globe say all masks work to stop the transmission of the virus. Macpherson sees YouTube enforcing its policies consistently.

"YouTube has a clearly stated policy on medical misinformation. When information is posted that masks are not effective at spreading the virus, which contradicts the range of health authorities that YouTube uses as reference points for the most authoritative information, they apply that policy to this particular post," she said.

Paul argues YouTube is engaging in censorship, but even a policy expert at the Cato Institute, a libertarian-leaning think tank, said YouTube, as a private company, has the right to decide what videos get the boot.

"As a practical matter, probably, it is more useful to let these things be debated, even if he's providing information that is incorrect or contestable. But as a platform, they have the right to make rules about what content they don't want to be hosted on their platform," said Julian Sanchez, a senior fellow at Cato.

"Rand Paul has already exercised the option available to him in a marketplace of ideas, which is he uploaded that video to another video sharing site called Rumble," Sanchez added.