

Introduction

The global population is projected to reach 8 billion people towards the end of 2022 with more than half of the population in Asia (United Nations, 2022). The estimated population of sub-Saharan Africa reached 1.2 billion people and is comparable with the populations of North America and Europe combined (~1.1 billion) (United Nations, 2022). A recent overview of digital access suggests that 5.03 billion individuals use the Internet worldwide, with approximately 4.70 billion, or 59% of the global population, using some form of social media (DataReportal.com, 2022). While it is challenging to determine overlap across platforms, it has been reported elsewhere that worldwide exposure to information on either Facebook or YouTube¹ is in excess of 2 billion people each (Meta, 2022; YouTube, 2022), and the Pew Research Center (Pew Research, 2021) reported that approximately 72% of U.S. adults use at least one social media outlet. Of relevance to the present work, it is estimated that some 90% of Americans use social media sources for health information (Bishop, 2019). This includes searches related to serious conditions, general information searches, and searches for minor health problems. Research demonstrates that online information can influence health beliefs, health behaviors, and decisions about seeking healthcare.

In the context of such high utilization of the Internet and social media to inform health decisions by the public, stakeholders have raised serious concerns about the quality and reliability of health information on social media due to the lack of standards or regulations—these concerns were heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic. While mis- and disinformation about healthcare topics is neither new nor unique to social media, the viral nature of attention-grabbing posts, platform algorithms that elevate popular content, and limited resources to vet every item posted to social media amplifies the volume of misinformation that readers are exposed to on every social media channel. Because of the potential for harmful misinformation to spread quickly on social media, there has been worldwide outcry for action.

In response to this outcry and driven in part by the prevalence of misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic, Google/YouTube² supported efforts to develop principles and attributes to guide social media companies and other digital platforms in identifying and elevating credible sources of health information.

In the first phase, an advisory panel convened by the National Academy of Medicine (NAM) developed a set of principles and attributes that could be used to determine credibility of health information sources.³ The scope of phase one was limited to U.S.-based entities, and the advisory committee concentrated on nonprofit and government entities with established vetting or accrediting procedures (e.g., federal government agencies, educational institutions, and academic journals). The goal was to determine whether the **source** of the information, if not the content itself, was likely to be credible according to a set of pre-defined attributes. The World Health Organization (WHO) convened an expert panel to vet this initial guidance for a global perspective. The NAM-WHO guidance informed new steps taken to highlight credible sources of health information on YouTube's platform (See: <https://www.youtube.com/howyoutubeworks/product-features/health-information/>).

¹ The administrative work for the present paper was supported by funding from YouTube. YouTube representatives were not involved in advisory committee deliberations, in drafting the principles and attributes, or in drafting the paper.

² YouTube is owned by Alphabet Inc., the parent company of Google (see <https://abc.xyz>).

³ For an overview of the NAM project, see <https://nam.edu/programs/principles-for-defining-and-verifying-the-authority-of-online-providers-of-health-information>. YouTube provided funding totaling \$100,000 to offset the NAM's operational expenses in facilitating the project. Karen DeSalvo, Chief Health Officer, Google Health, is an NAM member and serves on the NAM's governing Council. Garth Graham, Director and Global Head of Healthcare and Public Health Partnerships, is an NAM member (see <https://blog.youtube/news-and-events/new-health-content-coming-youtube>).

