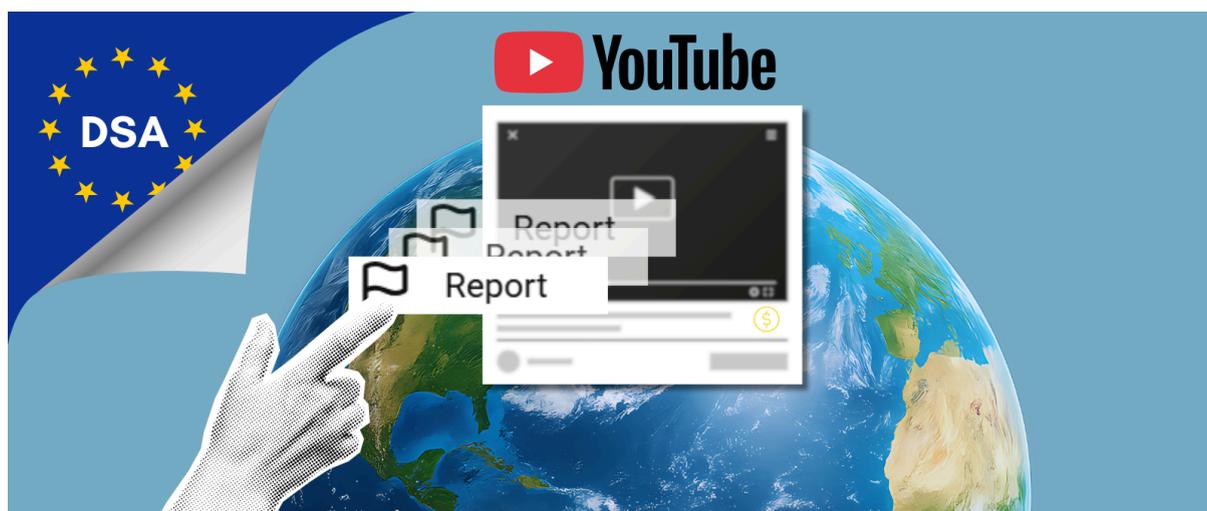


# YouTube Lies

How the Largest Video Platform Finances Climate Misinformation,  
Going Against its Own Policies and the EU Digital Services Act



A report by **Fundación Maldita.es**  
March, 2026

## Executive Summary

Starting in 2021, YouTube policies [prohibit](#) “ads for, and monetization of, content that contradicts well-established scientific consensus around the existence and causes of climate change”. This is a policy that, according to our research, **YouTube consistently fails to apply**.

Fundación Maldita.es has identified 20 YouTube channels with an accumulated 21 million subscribers that spread climate misinformation previously debunked by Maldita. They are not outliers or low-impact creators: **half of them rank among the top 50 most subscribed news and politics channels** in Spain according to [SubSub](#). The videos containing climate misinformation themselves have amassed more than 3 million views, and all of them display advertising and generate revenue for their creators and YouTube, in contradiction with the platform’s rules.

That in itself is concerning, but as part of the investigation we also reported the videos to YouTube as a violation of its [advertising rules](#): **in all of 20 cases, YouTube not only failed to take action on the content as per its own policies, but also did not even reply to our reports, in a flagrant and systematic violation of the EU Digital Services Act** that obliges the platform “inform complainants without undue delay of their reasoned decision and of the possibility of out-of-court dispute settlement”. More than a month later, we are still waiting for a reply.

We find it hard to believe that YouTube cannot do better. The public has a reasonable expectation that any platform—but particularly one of YouTube’s size—must have the capacity to enforce the rules it makes for itself, but beyond the issue of capacity is one of willingness. On many of the videos in this investigation YouTube does display climate information banners that, according to its [2025 DSA risk assessment](#), appear on “videos related to topics prone to misleading information”. In other words: **YouTube had already detected the videos have a high chance of being violative of its policies, and yet they continue to monetize them**.

These findings call into question whether YouTube’s policies on climate misinformation have any real impact, and indicate the platform is actually offering financial incentives to produce that kind of content. Moreover, they showcase how YouTube is not complying with one of the more simple yet fundamental provisions of the EU Digital Services Act, its obligation to consider their users’ claims regarding the application of the platform’s terms and conditions, and to inform them of YouTube’s view on the matter and possibilities for redress.

### YouTube Lies

How the Largest Video Platform Finances Climate Misinformation, Going Against its Own Policies and the EU Digital Services Act  
A Report by **Fundación Maldita.es**, March 2026

## Table of Contents

<a href="#">Executive Summary</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Table of Contents</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">The Experiment</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Narratives and Unscientific Claims in the Videos</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Monetization</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">The Policy and Enforcement Gap</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">YouTube's own rules</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">The EU Digital Services Act (DSA)</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Detailed Methodology</a>	<a href="#">7</a>

### **YouTube Lies**

How the Largest Video Platform Finances Climate Misinformation, Going Against its Own Policies and the EU Digital Services Act  
A Report by **Fundación Maldita.es**, March 2026

## The Experiment

Fundación Maldita.es identified 20 channels sharing climate misinformation, with a combined subscriber count exceeding 21 million. To put this into perspective, that is nearly half of Spain's total population. Ten of these channels also ranked among the top 50 most subscribed news and politics channels in Spain according to [SubSub](#), with individual subscriber counts ranging from 153,000 to 7 million.

This reach is particularly relevant given how Spaniards consume news. In Spain, those who say they follow current affairs closely prefer YouTube (34%) over news media websites (31%) as a source of digital information, according to the [Digital News Report Spain 2025](#). Against this backdrop, these accounts are not operating at the margins of the information ecosystem, they are among some of the most important news sources in the country.

## Narratives and Unscientific Claims in the Videos

The videos identified in the investigation have received over 3 million views in total. The climate misinformation narratives found in some of these channels contained outright denial of climate change or distortions of scientific consensus on its effects and causes:

- For instance, one of the videos claims “there is [no statistical evidence](#) that warming worsens or increases the frequency of hurricanes, floods, droughts, or similar disasters.”
- Another video advances the [false claim](#) that there is no scientific consensus on climate change and asserts that significant disagreements exist within the scientific community.

A number of videos also contained misinformation about climate policies, aimed at weakening trust in democratic institutions and presenting them as ideological or coercive. These narratives seem to be effective because they do not always dismiss the existence of climate change but rather weaponise political polarisation and layer it on top of climate-related content:

- For example, a video [falsely claims](#) that climate change is “caused by humans, yes, but through engineering weapons, through climate engineering,” and suggests that this is being carried out by the government.
- Another video [falsely claims](#) that “in Spain, Europe, and the UN, millions and millions are being moved around for something that is not real,” argues that climate change is “highly debatable,” questions whether it is caused by human activity or natural factors, presenting climate policy as “another form of corruption.”

As the view count evidently shows, this type of content hooks users, ups interaction, and gets pushed across the platform through the algorithm.

### YouTube Lies

How the Largest Video Platform Finances Climate Misinformation, Going Against its Own Policies and the EU Digital Services Act  
A Report by **Fundación Maldita.es**, March 2026

## Monetization

All videos identified in this investigation were monetized, with ads appearing before or during playback. Monetization is central to understanding why climate misinformation proliferates on the platform. YouTube's Partner Program [pays creators 55% of net revenues](#) from ads displayed on their videos, with YouTube retaining the remaining 45%. This means that every view on a climate misinformation video generates income for both the creator and the platform itself. As such, **YouTube does not only host and effectively finance this content, it financially benefits from it.**

This revenue-sharing model encourages creators to prioritise content that maximises engagement and, as the previous section shows, misinformation is particularly effective at doing that. The result is a feedback loop where misleading content attracts views, views generate ad revenue, and that revenue incites the production of similar content. This is not an unintended side effect but a consequence of how the Partner Program is designed. YouTube is funding and profiting from the very content its own policies are supposed to go against.

Taken together, the scale, reach, and monetization of climate misinformation on YouTube point to something beyond moderation failures. This is precisely the kind of systemic risk that the Digital Services Act was designed to address, where **the platform's own systems contribute to the spread of harmful content at scale.**

### YouTube Lies

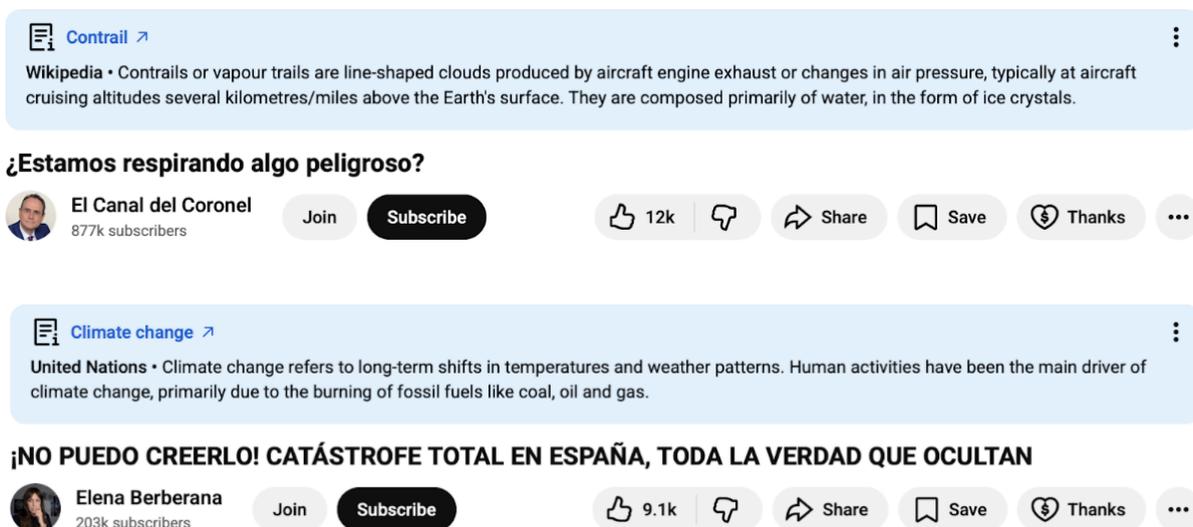
How the Largest Video Platform Finances Climate Misinformation, Going Against its Own Policies and the EU Digital Services Act  
A Report by **Fundación Maldita.es**, March 2026

# The Policy and Enforcement Gap

## YouTube's own rules

In 2021, YouTube [announced](#) it would start prohibiting “ads for, and monetization of, content that contradicts well-established scientific consensus around the existence and causes of climate change”, stating they “use a combination of automated tools and human review to enforce this policy against [...] YouTube videos that are monetizing via YouTube’s Partner Program.”

Yet the videos identified in this research 5 years later, despite falling within the scope of that policy, remain monetized. YouTube clearly deploys automated systems capable of detecting climate-related content, since many of the videos in this investigation displayed information banners linking to UN pages on climate change or Wikipedia pages on conspiracy theories, an intervention that according to YouTube’s [2025 DSA risk assessment](#) appears on topics prone to misleading information. **The issue here is that detection does not translate into enforcement. Even if videos trigger contextual banners, they continue to display ads even if they should be ineligible for monetization under YouTube’s policies.**



## The EU Digital Services Act (DSA)

According to the DSA, this enforcement gap carries legal consequences. Article 34 requires designated very large online platforms such as YouTube to account for their own terms and conditions and most importantly, the enforcement of these policies when assessing systemic risks. If a platform sets out rules against monetizing climate misinformation but fails to apply them, it is falling short of its own commitments. Under Article 14 of the DSA, intermediary services are required to act in a diligent, objective, and proportionate manner when applying and enforcing their policies. In this sense, YouTube's terms and conditions are not voluntary, they are the one of the yardsticks against which DSA compliance is measured.

### YouTube Lies

How the Largest Video Platform Finances Climate Misinformation, Going Against its Own Policies and the EU Digital Services Act  
A Report by **Fundación Maldita.es**, March 2026

Moreover, articles 34 and 35 of the DSA place an obligation on very large online platforms to identify, assess, and mitigate systemic risks arising from their services. Misinformation is explicitly listed among those risks. Yet climate misinformation intersects with other systemic risks like public health and safety. Take for instance videos claiming that CO2 is harmless or false narratives that spread in the aftermath of natural disasters. Platforms are not only required to assess these risks but to also adapt and rectify failures when mitigation measures prove insufficient.

Finally, the absence of a reply from YouTube to our in-platform reports of violative content goes against Article 20 of the DSA, which requires platforms to inform complainants “without undue delay” of a reasoned decision on the content in question and to explain what action was taken, as well as the available options for redress. This mechanism is meant to give users and researchers visibility into how platforms apply and enforce their own rules in practice. Our investigation points to clear failure on different fronts. YouTube's revenue-sharing model creates financial incentives for the production of misinformation, and its enforcement appears weak even when directed—or perhaps especially when directed—at high-impact accounts. **Evidence suggests that YouTube's architecture facilitates climate-related systemic risks rather than mitigate it.**

This is also contrary to the commitments YouTube has made under the EU Code of Practice on Disinformation that the European Commission has considered as a benchmark for assessing DSA compliance. The co-regulatory text calls on signatories to demonetize disinformation, cut financial incentives for its production, and curb its algorithmic amplification. The monetization of high-reach climate disinformation on some of the most-subscribed YouTube news and politics channels in Spain points to a clear violation of the platform's obligations under the DSA.

## **YouTube Lies**

How the Largest Video Platform Finances Climate Misinformation, Going Against its Own Policies and the EU Digital Services Act  
A Report by **Fundación Maldita.es**, March 2026

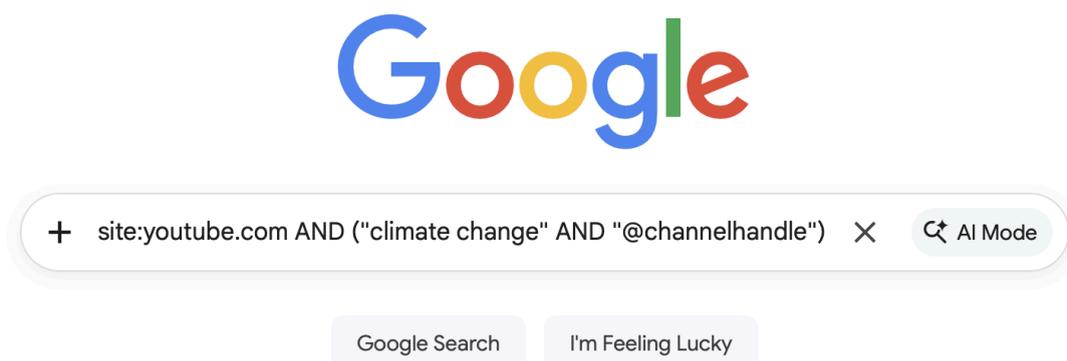
## Detailed Methodology

### Channel selection

Channel selection focused on high-impact accounts able to reach large audiences. Two different samples were combined. First, using [SubSub](#), a platform that tracks YouTube channel rankings, we identified the top 50 most subscribed Spanish channels under the News and Politics category and reviewed each individually, selecting those found to be sharing climate misinformation. Second, high-impact channels previously identified by Maldita.es as recurring sources of climate misinformation on YouTube were considered. Data for each selected channel, including subscriber counts and views, was recorded in a database using [TubePilot's YouTube Data Viewer](#), allowing us to quantify scale and reach of these videos.

### Content selection

YouTube [updated its search filters in early 2025](#) and now orders its search results by an opaque “popularity” signal, making it harder to surface specific types of content through YouTube’s native search. To work around this, we used a boolean query in Google combining *site:YouTube.com* with relevant search terms and channel handles and switched search settings from “All results” to “Verbatim,” which forces Google to return only exact matches to our search terms. From the results, we identified videos whose titles or descriptions suggested they could contain climate-related information and reviewed their transcripts manually using [YouTubeToTranscript](#). We then assessed whether any claims made in these videos amounted to climate misinformation by matching them against previously debunked content by Maldita.es, which classifies climate misinformation using published scientific evidence and expert knowledge.



### YouTube Lies

How the Largest Video Platform Finances Climate Misinformation, Going Against its Own Policies and the EU Digital Services Act  
A Report by **Fundación Maldita.es**, March 2026

Tools ▾

Any time ▶	
All results ▶	All results ✓
Advanced Search	Verbatim
About 0 results (0,17s)	

## Monetization

The analysis focused on monetized videos because ad policy enforcement is currently the only moderation pathway that explicitly covers climate misinformation on YouTube. We checked whether the selected videos were monetized using a [third-party monetization checker](#), and then cross-checked this using the [TubeLab](#) and [Nexlev](#) extensions, which can reasonably infer whether a channel is likely part of the YouTube Partner Program more broadly. These tools allowed us to determine with a degree of confidence whether a video was being monetized before reporting the content and to track if the violative content was demonetized afterwards.

## Reporting

Each video was reported through YouTube's notice and action mechanism. When reporting we referred to [YouTube's advertising rules](#), which define harmful misinformation as content that contradicts the scientific consensus on the existence or causes of climate change and state that such content should not receive advertising revenue. All reports were submitted on 30 January and by the time this investigation was published, we had received no reply from YouTube and the videos remained online and monetized.

### YouTube Lies

How the Largest Video Platform Finances Climate Misinformation, Going Against its Own Policies and the EU Digital Services Act  
A Report by **Fundación Maldita.es**, March 2026

## ***YouTube Lies***

*How the Largest Video Platform Finances Climate Misinformation,  
Going Against its Own Policies and the EU Digital Services Act*

A Report by **Fundación Maldita.es**  
March 2026

You can contact us at ***policy@maldita.es***

## **YouTube Lies**

How the Largest Video Platform Finances Climate Misinformation, Going Against its Own Policies and the EU Digital Services Act  
A Report by **Fundación Maldita.es**, March 2026