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YouTube Loses Lawsuit Over Blacklisted Video

By Natalya Krainova

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A Moscow court on Monday upheld a November order of the Federal Consumer Protection Service to ban a YouTube video based on allegations that it contained instructions on how to commit suicide.

The watchdog's order stems from a law that took effect in November aimed at protecting children from harmful information on the Web, including child pornography and materials promoting drug use or suicide. The law empowered the government to create an official blacklist of web pages and to block that material on Internet networks in Russia.

Advocates for freedom of speech and information have warned that the blacklist could be abused by overzealous regulators, but top officials have waived off those concerns as baseless.

Earlier on Monday, the consumer protection agency issued a statement harshly criticizing YouTube and its parent company, Google, for seeking to restore the video through the courts.

The agency accused the companies of violating the November law for the sake of commercial interests.

"Realizing the detrimental nature and potential danger from the videos posted on their site, being led by commercial motives and using legal casuistry, the Google-owned company YouTube continues to avoid following the requirements of Russian legislation aimed at suicide prevention and for that purpose is appealing the court decision in an arbitration court," the agency said.

It issued a similarly critical statement about Google Russia and YouTube concerning the same lawsuit in March, accusing it of sacrificing the interests of children for the sake of freedom of information.

An unidentified representative of YouTube, which blocked the video clip in November, argued at the Moscow Arbitration Court on Monday that the clip titled "Video Lesson: How to Cut Veins = D" contained instructions on how to apply makeup, Interfax reported.

An unidentified representative of the consumer protection agency countered that the video's title contained "a call and instructions" for suicide, Interfax reported.

Because the video has been blocked, its exact contents are unknown. A spokeswoman for Google's Moscow office and a spokeswoman for the consumer protection watchdog refused to comment on what the video showed.

YouTube has yet to decide whether to appeal Monday's ruling, Google said in an emailed statement.

The watchdog based its allegations about the video on the opinion of a group of experts who were not publicly identified.

The court denied YouTube's request to provide the company with information about the qualifications of the experts hired by the watchdog who alleged that the video urged viewers to commit suicide, Interfax reported Monday.

However, the watchdog harshly criticized an expert hired by YouTube, Moscow State University professor Olga Karabanova, who concluded that the video contained no information about methods of committing suicide.

It said that Karabanova, who has a doctorate degree in psychology, was not known as an expert in suicide, hinting that she had been bribed into providing a certain opinion.

The watchdog called Karabanova, 61, a winner in 2001 of the Lomonosov Prize for pedagogical work and author of about 70 research works, "possibly a professor" with "pathologically deformed logic" who "cynically distorted facts" like a person who is "not familiar with indisputable family values."

Russia has the third-highest teen suicide rate in the world. Between November and March, the watchdog blocked 1,164 websites under the November law, the majority of them because they contained information on how to commit suicide.

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