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YouTube is considering far-reaching changes to its platform after a string of incidents that put the video-streaming powerhouse on the defensive. Executives at the Google unit are debating moving all children's content into a separate product, the existing stand-alone YouTube Kids app, to better protect young viewers from objectionable videos, said people briefed on the talks. That would be a seismic and risky switch, as children's videos are among the most popular on the platform and carry millions of dollars in advertising.

Some YouTube employees are pushing for another significant modification. They are encouraging the company to switch off for children's programming a feature that automatically plays a new video after one has been completed, the people briefed said. While that default setting—known as YouTube's recommendation system—has helped boost audience hours to new heights, it has also opened the company up to criticism that children and parents can select innocuous videos only to be automatically transferred to inappropriate fare.

The proposed changes are motivated in part by a continuing investigation by the Federal Trade Commission, people familiar with the matter said. The probe was initiated by a complaint last year from consumer groups that accused Alphabet Inc.'s Google of exploiting

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YouTube's popularity with children to illegally amass data on minors under 13 without parental consent, the people said. The groups also alleged that the website subjected children to inappropriate content. The company has said that in 2015 it created YouTube Kids—which doesn't collect data on minors—in part to address concerns like those. An FTC spokeswoman declined to comment.

YouTube in recent years has grown into a media force. The company says users watch one billion hours of content each day. The possible changes, though still under discussion and not considered imminent, would be among the biggest ever for the platform, not least because they would require alterations to YouTube's infrastructure and significant negotiations over the boundaries of children's content. "We consider lots of ideas for improving YouTube and some remain just that—ideas," a YouTube spokeswoman said.

The internal discussions come in response to critiques inside and outside YouTube that it has been flat-footed in addressing hate-based and conspiracy-strewn content, and failed to adequately police videos featuring or targeted to children. Taken together, the incidents have helped drive internal debates to areas once considered off-limits, according to people familiar with the discussions.

Google Chief Executive Sundar Pichai, who hasn't often interceded in day-to-day YouTube operations in his four years running the company, has lately become personally involved in steering the unit through recent stumbles, people familiar with the matter said. YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki has conceded missteps, privately telling employees in a recent memo that some of the company's recent decisions on lightning-rod issues were "disappointing and painful."

The YouTube spokeswoman said Mr. Pichai "is consistently engaged with Susan and her leadership team on various complex, high-profile YouTube product launches and business matters." YouTube in recent months previewed adjustments to its rules around which videos to allow and to promote. The platform changes are designed to choke viewership for certain content by burying it far from most users, rather than proactively eliminating wide swaths of videos. There is also a new company mantra, endorsed by Ms. Wojcicki in internal meetings: "It's not about free speech, it's about free reach." Google profits off YouTube videos by taking a cut of revenue from advertising and related sales in areas such as merchandise.

A survey from the Pew Research Center last year showed that more than four out of five parents with children 11 and younger have given them permission to watch a YouTube video. More than one-third of those parents let their children watch videos on the site regularly. Since its 2006 acquisition by Google for what is now widely considered the bargain price of \$1.65 billion, YouTube has become the second most popular website in the world by traffic, behind only its parent's eponymous search engine. Some two billion people use YouTube each month, the company says, nearly as many as Facebook. That makes it a crucial cog in Google's future prospects. Google parent Alphabet discloses little detail about YouTube's financial results. Executives said on Alphabet's most recent earnings call that YouTube growth was slowing, helping send the conglomerate's stock to its worst day in nearly seven years. Ms. Wojcicki was one of Google's earliest employees. She is the former sister-in-law of

company co-founder Sergey Brin. YouTube operates separately from Google in San Bruno, Calif., 25 miles north of the mother company's main campus.

Crises roiled YouTube this spring. In March, footage of mass shootings at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, spread quickly on the platform. A spokesman said YouTube removed thousands of related videos. Earlier this month, Harvard University researchers said they found that YouTube's algorithm was recommending videos of prepubescent children to pedophiles to keep users on the platform longer.

The company subsequently said it would take action. "When it comes to kids," YouTube wrote in an unsigned June blog post, "we take an extra-cautious approach towards our enforcement and we're always making improvements." Comments were earlier disabled on some videos featuring minors. Meanwhile the FTC investigation was continuing, although some consumer representatives close to the probe cautioned that it is still unclear when or how it might be concluded. The Washington Post previously reported on the investigation.

Also in June, progressive video producer Carlos Maza gained national attention for highlighting two years of provocation from conservative shock-jock Steven Crowder. In YouTube videos for his four million followers, Mr. Crowder described Mr. Maza as an "anchor baby," a "lispy queer" and "a Mexican." Mr. Maza, who is gay, was born in Miami and is of Cuban descent. When Mr. Maza complained to YouTube, it responded publicly that the language was hurtful, but not in violation of company policies. After the incident went viral, YouTube yanked advertising from Mr. Crowder's videos, citing "widespread harm to the YouTube community."

Mr. Crowder didn't respond to requests for comment but has said the company disproportionately punishes conservative commentators. In the controversy's wake, Google's Mr. Pichai hosted a private meeting for LGBT Google and YouTube employees in which he was peppered with questions about why YouTube didn't more regularly enforce its behavioral rules, which ban "hateful content," and develop new systems to police conduct like Mr. Crowder's, say people familiar with the matter.

Mr. Pichai responded that Google and YouTube favored a more incremental approach. He said that large-scale harassment-policy changes were unlikely to be implemented before year-end. "Doing something would require them to shut down some of their biggest, most popular creators," Mr. Maza said. "Google and YouTube both have a really powerful incentive to act like this is more complicated than it actually is." Ms. Wojcicki didn't attend Mr. Pichai's question-and-answer session, citing a prior commitment to attend a conference in Scottsdale, Ariz. She sent a subsequent email to employees complimenting their "continued engagement on these issues." YouTube said "it will take time for our systems to fully ramp up." – *Wall Street Journal*

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Work on WQED's (Pittsburgh) Oakland broadcast tower – to ready its television station for the move to a new frequency – will affect its radio

signal Thursday as well as June 29. Over-the-air and HD radio signals will be out intermittently from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Thursday and from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. June 29 as the station prepares to change its television frequency.

The outages are temporary and according to WQED Multimedia, listeners will be able to access programming at [WQED.org/FM](http://WQED.org/FM). WQED sold bandwidth in a reverse FCC auction in 2017, necessitating the move to a new frequency. – ***Pittsburgh Post-Gazette***



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