

YouTube urged to delete videos linked to suicide

By James Cook

YOUTUBE is under pressure to remove dozens of disturbing videos promoting an online game after it was found to encourage children to commit suicide.

The craze, named the Momo Challenge, requires children to message a fictional horror character named Momo by calling or sending texts to strangers' phone numbers they find on the internet. Some of these can be found on YouTube, the video-sharing platform owned by Google.

The anonymous person will then instruct children to engage in dares or challenges. These can range from relatively innocent activities such as watching a horror film or staying up late, through to self-harm and suicide. Children are told to film themselves and send the clips to Momo, who responds by sending more dares.

The NSPCC said the challenge, which has already been linked to the suicide of a 12-year-old girl in Buenos Aires, Argentina, was "really worrying".

Such online viral challenges can serve as a platform for anonymous, or pseudonymous, cyber-bullying, experts have warned. What

begins as a creepy prank can become serious as online bullies post abusive messages or use the victim's phone number to contact them through other social media platforms. The Momo Challenge has spread through social media, including services such as Twitter, Snapchat and YouTube.

Google's parent company Alphabet is worth more than \$840 billion (£660 billion), raising questions over whether it receives revenue from adverts posted alongside YouTube videos that are promoting the challenge.

These videos have built up hundreds of thousands of views. Some videos, which appear at the top of search results for people seeking it out on YouTube, list the phone numbers of strangers.

YouTube removed one video, which had reached hundreds of thousands of views, after *The Daily Telegraph* contacted the firm, but declined to comment.

Lauren Seager-Smith, chief executive of Kidscape, said: "I'm yet to really see tech companies putting children's safety first and foremost. I don't think they do. I think that they like a viral campaign because it means that lots of people are on the platform."

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