

Feedback on Draft Bill to combat Misinformation and Disinformation

- Other than communications which incite violence against a person or group of people, the Australian govt or any of its agencies should not interfere with the right of freedom of speech. Australians have a right to seek information from a variety of sources (most of which are on digital platforms) and to express a range of opinions – how else are new truths uncovered? Do they only come from govt-approved sources?
- Who will determine what is 'dis' and what is 'mis' information - will the standard be: does not align with the official narrative? If that's the case, will we still be living in a free society where alternative thoughts can be expressed and counter-challenged by other thoughts?
- What if today's so-called misinformation or disinformation turns out to be true in a few months? Will there be an official apology and even compensation for harms done? Given the impossibility of determining with accuracy what is misinformation and what is disinformation, it is dangerous to propose legislation which seeks to suppress such content – such moves risk being tainted by bias toward the ruling powers – which is the antithesis of freedom of speech. Other than calls to violence against a person or group of people, all other information should remain to participate in the battle of ideas.
- Will ACMA also act to promote truth in advertising? To address the overt and subtle disinformation that is conveyed through most commercial advertising every day? I notice also that the proposed amendment will not apply to authorised electoral and referendum content - why is that? Isn't the information that persuades Australians to choose their leader or amend Australia's constitution one of the most important pieces of mass communication to monitor? Won't misinformation/disinformation in those nation-defining acts result in substantial long-term harm/good?
- We are sliding towards an Orwellian world if we take the route suggested by the draft Bill. So, how else can we deal with mass dissemination of falsehoods? 1) Implement programs to build critical thinking amongst individuals – to be able to discern and take the time to research to determine what is true and what isn't b) Have a trustworthy media 2) have trustworthy governments that build connections with communities through genuine, regular, open dialogue and admit when mistakes are made 3) encourage local community-building and grassroots civic engagement and 4) create an environment that fosters healthy debates - not silence dissenting voices.
- A democratic government that silences voices is one that has lost touch with the citizenry and has no mechanisms other than to clamp down to maintain control. I sincerely hope that this Bill does not progress – for the sake of upholding our democratic rights and building a mature society and government where openness, critical thinking, transparency and free expression can flourish.