

1. Introduction

Who determines what is mis information or dis information? Prior to the Covid 19 pandemic these were terms that regular people had I would suggest vary rarely ever heard let alone see repeatedly on the main stream media and also parroted around the globe! These terms were used to discredit and silence those that had other view points that were different to the government narrative this went so far as to state that those that the government had decided were providing mis information or dis information were terrorists and should be arrested! Now three years later it is shown that the mis information and dis information was actually coming from the government not those that the govt had labelled as terrorists! So again who determines what is dis information or mis information because as we have seen in the past three years this is CCP type control of information – as ██████████ said in New Zealand The government was the sole source of truth! However governments have shown that they cannot be trusted with being the sole source of truth and the truth does not mind being questioned only lies need opposing views to be silenced!

The freedom of speech is a fundamental right cherished by democratic societies worldwide. While the intention may be to protect citizens from harmful or false information, implementing government-perceived misinformation censorship poses significant risks to democratic principles and individual liberties. In this submission, we will argue that government censorship of perceived misinformation undermines transparency, stifles public discourse, fosters an environment of mistrust, and ultimately threatens the very essence of a free society.

1. Slippery Slope towards Authoritarianism

Once the government assumes the power to censor perceived misinformation, it treads a perilous path towards authoritarianism. Defining misinformation is subjective and prone to biases. Inevitably, those in power may abuse this authority to silence dissent, suppress opposition, and control the narrative in their favour. Such actions undermine the democratic foundation, as the government becomes the arbiter of truth, limiting the diversity of opinions essential for a vibrant society. This also shows the government have no faith in their constituents to be able to perceive truth from fiction!

2. The Problem of Subjectivity

Misinformation can be a complex issue to address, as it often exists on a spectrum. Determining what constitutes misinformation and what merely reflects differing

opinions can be highly subjective. What some may see as misinformation might, in reality, be a legitimate alternative viewpoint supported by credible evidence. Introducing government censorship based on perception alone creates a dangerous environment where dissenting voices are silenced, hindering progress and fostering groupthink, which we have seen in the past three years and to some extent is still occurring.

3. Freedom of Information and Open Debate

Preserving freedom of speech and the flow of information is vital for the functioning of a democratic society. A government that censors perceived misinformation risks becoming an information gatekeeper, controlling access to certain ideas and viewpoints. This undermines the principle of open debate, where ideas are subjected to scrutiny, and the public can make informed decisions. Instead of relying on censorship, governments should focus on promoting media literacy and critical thinking to empower citizens to discern fact from fiction.

4. Strengthening Misinformation Beliefs

Censorship often backfires, leading to the Streisand Effect - where attempts to suppress information result in even greater attention and dissemination of that information. When governments censor perceived misinformation, they inadvertently lend credibility to the ideas they seek to suppress. People may start to perceive the censored content as subversive or forbidden, leading to the formation of echo chambers that reinforce misinformation beliefs. Emphasizing transparency and offering counterarguments are more effective means of combatting misinformation.

5. Chilling Effect on Free Expression

The fear of potential censorship can deter individuals from expressing their opinions and sharing their perspectives openly. This chilling effect stifles free expression and hampers the vibrant exchange of ideas necessary for societal progress. If people fear repercussions for sharing information that is later deemed misinformation, they may self-censor, leading to an impoverished public discourse and a democratic deficit.

6. Ineffectiveness and Erosion of Trust

Censorship is not a panacea for combating misinformation. In fact, it may lead to unintended consequences by making citizens question the government's motives and eroding trust in institutions. Effective communication and information dissemination, coupled with media literacy education, are more sustainable approaches to address misinformation. A well-informed public is better equipped to recognize and navigate through false information.

7. Preservation of Free Speech

Central to any democratic society is the preservation of free speech. The ability to express diverse opinions, challenge prevailing narratives, and engage in open discourse is vital for the exchange of ideas and the development of knowledge. Government censorship of perceived misinformation undermines this principle, as it empowers the government to decide what information should be disseminated, stifling dissent and hindering public discourse. By censoring perceived misinformation, the government risks suppressing valuable, albeit controversial, perspectives that contribute to a well-informed and democratic society.

8. Conclusion

Preserving freedom of speech is essential for upholding democratic values and individual liberties. The government censorship of perceived misinformation is not the solution. Instead, governments should focus on promoting media literacy, and encouraging open dialogue. Emphasizing transparency and engaging in respectful debate can foster a well-informed citizenry capable of discerning truth from falsehood. It is through these means that we can address the challenges posed by misinformation while preserving the cherished principles upon which our democratic societies are built. We want less government in our lives not more!