



Newly disclosed documents reveal a troubling pattern of clandestine censorship of social media posts by the Australian government at the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, with numerous instances targeting legitimate content, in stark contradiction to claims of misinformation.

Many of the 4,000 digital posts discreetly curtailed carried valid information or presented well-reasoned perspectives challenging the Covid-19 countermeasures. These posts offered balanced commentary on issues such as the partial efficacy of vaccines and the adverse impacts of widespread lockdowns and mask mandates.

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The unmasking came through the Freedom of Information applications that pointed to certain instances where the government, under the guise of preventing "potentially harmful information," compelled digital platforms like Instagram to remove posts, [The Australian reported](#).

One such instance was a post from April 2021, stating verifiable facts that "Covid-19 vaccine does not prevent Covid-19 infection or Covid-19 transmission." In spite of its accuracy, it was deemed as violating Instagram's community guidelines.

As part of this covert operation, the Australian government has channeled over \$1m towards World Services Australia, an affiliate of the London-based global communications firm M&C Saatchi, to scrutinize Covid-19 discourse on social media platforms and alert them of contentious content. The contract saw an array of posts on prominent platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube flagged and removed under the guise of violating the platform's community guidelines

While a significant fraction of the posts culled were indeed entrenched in conspiracy theories and misinformation, many others merely challenged mainstream Covid-19 narratives, delivering insights that now hold water.

A tweet, also from April 2021, drew attention for claiming that Covid-19 originated from a laboratory in Wuhan, China, and was funded by the US government. This notion, rejected as a conspiracy theory and deemed an offense by Twitter, is now acknowledged by American intelligence agencies as a plausible theory, revealing a disparity between the content flagged and the eventual findings.

The contentious censorship was unveiled through Freedom of Information applications lodged by senator Alex Antic.

"It's gravely concerning for all Australians who care about freedom of speech," said Senator Antic. The censorship operations actively curtailed posts with views counter to the government's position, creating a dangerous precedent for dissent in the digital age.

A video from January 2021 faced removal for promoting "civil disobedience," the report stated. The video portrayed an individual in Melbourne's Royal Botanic Gardens disregarding physical distancing signs, an act deemed worthy of censorship. Other posts faced a similar fate for merely opposing mask mandates and questioning the effectiveness of lockdowns and vaccines.

With the revelations pointing to a scale of censorship tantamount to an industrial process, concerns about the ongoing threat to freedom of speech in Australia have been amplified. Senator Antic referred to the

operations as a "censorship industrial complex," stoking fears of further encroachment under the proposed Misinformation Bill, which threatens hefty penalties for platforms hosting so-called "misinformation or disinformation."

"It's never been more imperative that we protect freedom of speech in Australia and reject this bill," warns Senator Antic, voicing the growing concern of an Australian public grappling with the aftermath of extensive digital censorship.