

Just some thoughts regarding the ACMA's proposed powers to combat misinformation and disinformation...

I find the idea of these laws frankly quite obscure, frivolous, and slightly Orwellian. In my opinion, making social media platforms responsible for what it's users express on their platform, is equivalent to 'shooting the messenger'. Speech in general is extremely subjective – whether it be hate-speech or misinformation. In an example, let's say a meme or something became very popular on social media, the contents of the meme were obviously untrue – almost everyone which looked at it knew that this was this case – that's what made it funny. Would that be considered misinformation? In general, it has been known for a long time that government has been very slow and ineffective in regulating speech. The way people speak to one another changes drastically all the time. It would be a huge burden on the taxpayer and the government to employ people to monitor the latest misinformation/disinformation. These laws also seem to target large social media companies. People who have the genuine intent to promote misinformation usually use other platforms which may not be well known, which would result in a larger burden on taxpayer to fund more employees to seek out new misinformation platforms. I should also raise the point; that by promoting and exercising these laws, the government is actively marginalising the people and groups which promote misinformation/disinformation. This may have the unintended consequence of actually further promoting their misinformed views - as when someone tries to hide something (such as misinformation) – it often draws more attention to it (in this case the misinformation) – further promoting it. This phenomenon has often been dubbed the 'Streisand affect', and unfortunately with these new laws/regulations the government are unfortunately going to fall victim to it again. These laws may also lead to more radical/extremist actions in Australia as people following these misinformed views will feel they are being shut down and may resort to violence and other extreme actions to make their point. I should also ask the question regarding if these laws would ever be abused by the government to let's say, silence dissidents or shut down genuine debate that may not align with the elected government's views. It doesn't matter what side of politics you come from, these laws in my opinion, are the greatest threat to our democracy and freedom of speech and expression in Australia.