



Facebook and the survival of rational democracy

Description



So after two days of Facebook gaol, my [Councillor Facebook page](#), the [Hawkesbury Liberal Team](#) page, and the [Hawkesbury District Independent Magazine](#) page are back up, after Facebook purged thousands of Australian pages including charities, public health sites and not-for-profit groups.

However, at time of writing, the worthy [Hawkesbury Post](#), [The Hawkesbury Gazette](#), and the [Hawkesbury Visitor Information Centre](#), which is a Council page, were still off-line.

What utter stupidity. Facebook can't even be consistent about what constitutes 'news'. Business students will one day write essays about how a [\\$745B](#) multinational trashed their branding in a stroke by citing this episode. It was a stunningly dumb move.

Here's what it boils down to. Many people choose to view their news through Facebook – for some it's the main way they keep informed. [Spain and Germany enacted similar copyright reforms in 2014](#) – seeking to charge aggregators for the value news sites conferred them.

In that case it was Google who removed news from their site. Immediately, there was an overall 20% reduction in news consumption. People were less informed – a poor outcome.

Now, ask yourself: With social platforms only making belated and cosmetic efforts to remove inflammatory and misleading content, if there's suddenly no professional journalism or fact checking in people's feeds, then what's left?

That's right. Facebook becomes even more of a sewer. Less fact, and more garbage.

I'm not convinced that the Federal Government's proposed [Media Bargaining Code](#) is the right solution, but I *am* convinced that they have picked the right fight.

We have to recognise that in our system of open democracy, the role of a free and viable Press serves a critical role to hold the powerful to account. The '[fourth estate](#)' provides a shared sense-making dialogue to society that helps us parse truth from flim-flam, scare-mongering and misinformation.

The eyes of the world are on us to hold our nerve – not unlike Australia pioneering plain packaging for cigarettes against a barrage of spurious lawsuits from the tobacco industry. We won that fight, and other countries followed our lead.

I've provided further remarks to the Hawkesbury Post. The link is [here](#). And if you feel strongly about supporting smaller news media outlets, who seem to be locked out of the benefits of the Federal scheme, then [make a donation to one here](#).

Category

1. Uncategorized

Date Created

February 20, 2021

Author

councill