Inquiry into the Impact of Social Media on Elections and Electoral Administration Survey

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SURVEY

Q1. Encouraging social media platforms to take more action against inappropriate activities (such as bots, harassment, trolling, spreading fake news).

Response: Very good idea
Social media platforms must have some accountability for the content that is displayed on their site - while they are not directly responsible for the specifics of the content that is put online, it is most clearly their intent is to encourage interaction, use and response by as many people as possible, and, if they can develop algorithms that enable them to collect our data and deliver us targeted advertising, surely there is similar technological solutions that can be developed to deal with the inappropriate activities you list. I realise the cost incentive to do this may not be there - but it is part of their social responsibility as creators of this new way of communication.

Q2. The government funding media literacy campaigns to help people know what they can trust online.

Response: Very good idea
Media literacy has always been needed to enable individuals to distinguish between credible sources of data and false or unsubstantiated information - this was taught throughout my school and higher education years. This type of education remains important - but so much more so now because we now live in a time when false information can be quickly transmitted, and in many of the places where this becomes accessible, there is no accountability for doing so, to either the author or to those forwarding it on. It is incredibly important that more funding is provided to enable the development, and ongoing adaptation of materials to meet the needs of all age groups - children and adults.

Q3. Requiring public disclosure of all online political advertising (for example, webpages created by social media platforms showing all of the political advertising on their platform and who paid for it, or webpages created by parties/candidates showing all of the online ads they have run).

Response: Very good idea
Yes. I am currently running for a position on Local Council and it is important that this type of information is transparent so voters are aware of who is actually paying for the messages that are being delivered. It should never be who has access to the most funds and can afford the most advertising, that gets the best chance of winning (so there should also be a cap on the amount that can be spent). I also dont think it is enough to just list "Greens Party", or "Liberal Party" as the funder - where are their funds coming from? Is it a mining company? Is it an oil company? The source of funds needs to be declared - and it should be a requirement that this information is given at least as much advertising time as the rest of the messaging that is paid for.

Q4. Requiring online electoral advertising to state who paid for it.

Response: Very good idea
As per comment in Q3.

Q5. Government support for independent and trust-worthy organisations that can fact-check claims or identify misinformation.

Response: Very good idea
Yes, this scrutiny should be applied throughout the election period. If false information is identified, this must be qualified by the candidate in a formal apology that isn't "political spin".

Q6. Using independent organisations (e.g. the Victorian Electoral Commission) as a source of reliable information about electoral candidates.

Response: Very good idea
Yes, this makes sense.

Q7. New laws requiring truth in political advertising.

Response: Very good idea
Yes, I can't believe this isn't in place already.

Q8. Are there other things you'd like to see the government do relating to social media or online advertising and elections?

Response: I encourage the panel to contact candidates from the Victorian Local Government elections who have had to solely rely on social media to run their campaign during the COVID-19 lockdown period. The power of social media has enabled this election to continue but has left us at the mercy of such platforms who now have much more information about me than I would have normally shared. In fact, a few years ago I got off social media for mental health reasons. Now I have had to start using it again, and to make it worse, Facebook required photo identification (licence) details to match me with my campaign page - I had made it a point never to provide real information like my birth-date, address or full name platforms such as this - but all of a sudden it became necessary or i could not advertise and "keep up" with other candidates. This, along with the range of information I am sharing in my posts to create a profile that appeals to a range of residents in my Ward, is pretty much putting my whole life in one easy to find package. It is really disconcerting. So - while there is a need to ensure transparency, there are also a range of risks to the individual (particularly at the Local level, less so the State unless you are running as an Independent) due to the amount of information you have to hand over - in this case it was either accept the risks or not run. Perhaps election material needs to be run via mediated platform pages so it can be fact checked before it it further distributed and also provides a level of protection for the individual be a step further away from the giants like Facebook whose profit is derived from my personal information.