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Annual Report
2023

Acknowledgement of Country

In the spirit of reconciliation Reset.Tech Australia acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

Aerial of remote Australian Landscape
Photo Credit: Benjamin Horgan

Who we are & what we do

https://au.reset.tech

Cover artwork
Jamillah Knowles/ Reset.Tech Australia/ Better Images of AI/ Connected Phones Australia (modified) CC-BY 4.0

We address digital risks and online harms by combining cutting-edge research methods with timely policy discussions.

We are highly intentional about sharing our insights and collaborating with civil society and community organisations. We welcome engagement from organisations seeking advice for building evidence bases for their own advocacy.

We exist to document issues and solutions, and 'bolt-on' capacity to organisations navigating the new and emerging risks and harms from the digital world, particularly where they target safety, wellbeing, and democracy.

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Navigation

— *This is an interactive timeline, please click the date to be taken to the relevant Key Activity.*
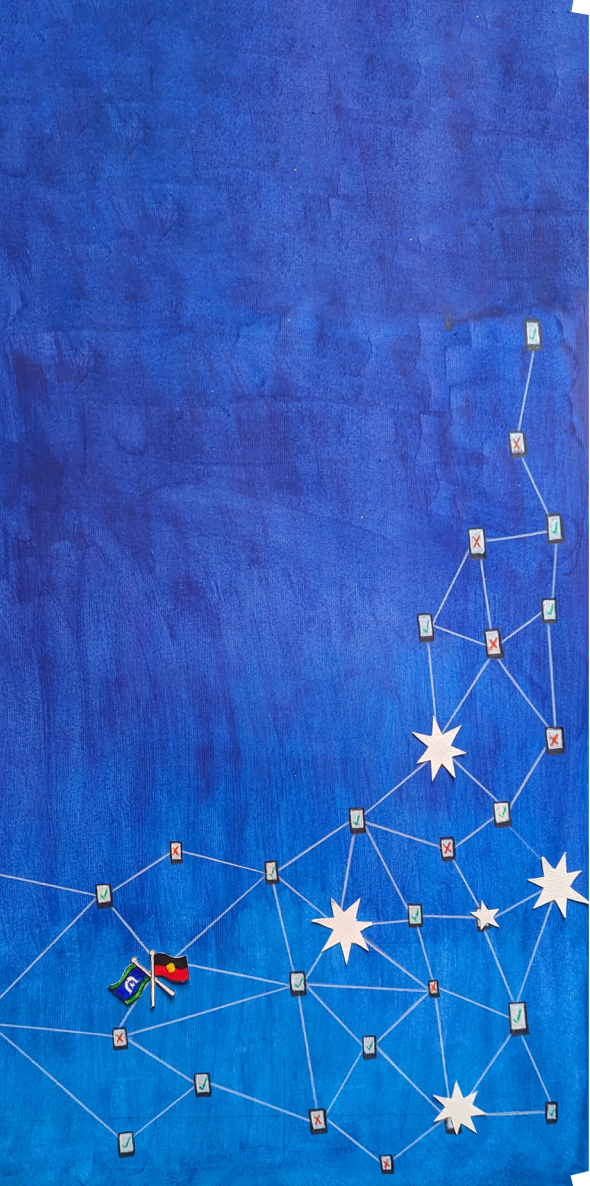
With thanks to the following artists and partners for their contributions to Reset. Tech's illustrations and visual imagery this year:
– Jamillah Knowles
– Armelle Skatulski
– Better Images of AI

Parliament House, Canberra.
Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons. CC-BY 4.0

Significant achievements across 2023

1. Launched the first-ever complaint under the *Australian Code of Practice* on *Disinformation and Misinformation*. After revealing that X (f.k.a. Twitter) shut down user-reporting for electoral misinformation across global markets, including Australia, they were struck off the Code.

2. Secured government commitment for a *Children's Privacy Code*, building on years of research and civil society convening efforts.

3. Brought 'systems and processes' digital risk assessments to the Australian market, by comprehensively testing the following efforts of TikTok, Facebook, and X in the referendum:
   a. Recommender systems (or algorithms)
   b. Content moderation
   c. Advertising approvals

4. Highlighted the failings of co-regulatory models frequently used in digital regulation in Australia, by exploring the failures in child protection created by industry-drafted online safety codes.

5. Made public how vulnerable Australians' data is secretly commercialised and traded.

Resetting the internet *for democracy*

> "... Empower the Australian Communications and Media Authority to "look under the hood" of the digital platforms and improve transparency about the systems and processes they have in place to protect Australians, including how they comply with the voluntary code they signed up for."

The Hon Michelle Rowland MP
Minister for Communications
Address to the National Press Club, 22nd November 2023

The Hon Michelle Rowland MP
Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons. CC-BY 4.0

State of the Nation

Governments around the world are shifting from 'techlash' responses to contemplating systemic and sustained solutions to protect the public from digital harms. Reset.Tech Australia's objective is to meet research and policy stakeholders 'where they are', furnishing them with evidence and ideas to assist their objectives of safeguarding Australians.

The Albanese Government has taken a careful and considered approach to crafting policy responses to digital harms. There has been a range of diverse policy consultations across 2023. Reset.Tech submitted to consultation processes on privacy, digital competition, artificial intelligence, online safety, electoral administration, and data brokering. Of these, Reset.Tech was invited to give further evidence on electoral administration, digital competition and regulatory architecture, and data brokering.

Our policy research and analysis has been influential in supporting:

— [Systems and processes focus](#) for the Communications portfolio, with a stronger emphasis on 'upstream' issues from digital platforms.

— [Public interest defense](#) for the targeted advertising proposal in the *Privacy Act Review*, and [identifying the tactics](#) behind industry's scare campaign.

— [Government support for the *Children's Privacy Code*](#) proposal in the *Privacy Act Review*.

House of Representatives
chair detail.
Photo Credit: Wikimedia
Commons. CC-BY 4.0

Looking forward into 2024

We are gearing up to assist policy stakeholders specifically on the following areas:

— Crafting public interest reforms in the *Privacy Act* throughout the ongoing consultation process, including the *Children's Privacy Code*.

— Supporting an ex ante digital competition regime that protects Australian consumers from digital market harms.

— Strengthening platform accountability and transparency measures currently under consideration by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts.

— Encouraging a systems and processes approach for the online safety regime, starting with the review into Basic Online Safety Expectations.

"**Safety is** — generally — about imposing transparency obligations onto firms before the harm occurs.

Enforcement is what happens when things go wrong."

Alice Dawkins
(Executive Director)
Address to Tech Policy
Futures, Parliament House,
28th March 2023

Key Activities

2023 Overview

16 February – Policy Impact
Government Response
to the *Privacy Act Review*

24 February – Policy Impact
Senate Inquiry into the
Influence of International
Digital Platforms

5 May – Policy Impact
Senate Inquiry into
the Administration of the Voice

17 May – Rapid Roundtables
Capacity of the consent
model online policy briefing

27 July – Research & Investigations
Realising young people's rights in
the digital environment report

07 September – Research & Investigations
Electoral process misinformation report

21 September – Rapid Roundtables
Targeted advertising and profiling
the *Privacy Act Review*: are we
going far enough? Policy briefing

14 September – Research & Investigations
Intrusive and unhelpful: targeted
advertising in Australia report

24 September – Research & Investigations
Advertising approvals evaluation report

05 October – Research & Investigations
Recommender systems evaluation report

03 November – Rapid Roundtables
Legislative interventions on
misinformation and disinformation
policy briefing

11 October – Research & Investigations
'Under-moderation' and
'over-moderation' evaluation report

18 October – Rapid Roundtables
Prohibiting targeting to children and
children's best interests: can the two
co-exist? Policy briefing

27 November – Enforcement
Resolution from the Australian
Code of Practice on Disinformation and
Misinformation's complaints process

05 December – Research & Investigations
Report on the Xandr dataset's
role in consumer manipulation of
vulnerable Australians

**05 December – Research & Investigations**
— Podcast on the harms of
targeted advertising
— Animation on targeted advertising
and data brokering

Key Activities

1.   Rapid Roundtables

Across the year, we hosted a number of rapid roundtables to create a forum for civil society and academic engagement in fast moving policy debates. We explore a topical issue, and convene a panel of subject-matter experts to provide timely advice on policy development. Research insights are then directly transmitted to the relevant contact (legislative or regulatory).

— *Can the consent model improve the digital world, especially for young people?* With ChildFund and the Australian Child Rights Taskforce

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Capacity of the consent model online
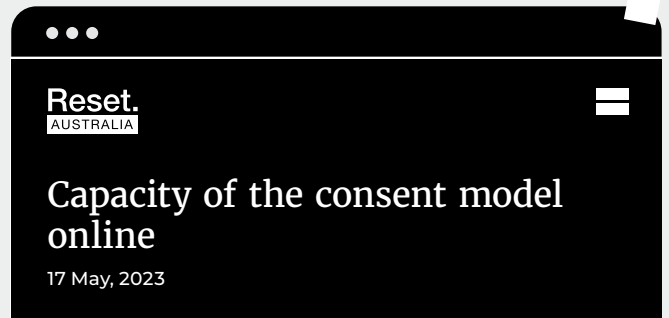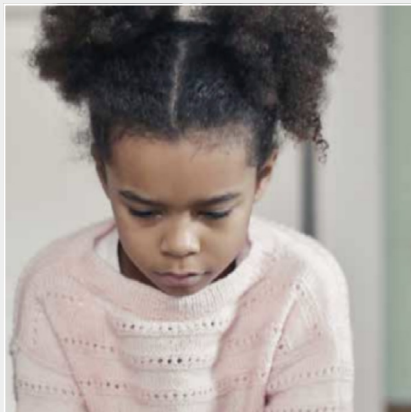
17 May, 2023

In May 2023, Reset.Tech hosted an expert roundtable discussion unpacking the capacity of the consent model to improve the digital world. We explored both the principles underpinning of the consent model, and its operationalisation.

This Roundtable was prompted by discussions emerging from the *Privacy Act Review*, and international policy moves towards using 'consent mechanisms' to deny young people's access to social media.

The roundtable found that the current consent model has systemic issues when applied to children, including:

— 'Consent'—when deployed by services that are essential for children—could be an abuse of power, and this warrants stronger obligations on digital platforms

— Defining an 'age of capacity' may distract focus from fair terms

— Privacy protections should place responsibility on platforms to ensure fair practices, and be proportionate and risk-based

Key Activities

1.   Rapid Roundtables

— *Targeted advertising and profiling in the Privacy Act Review: are we going far enough?*
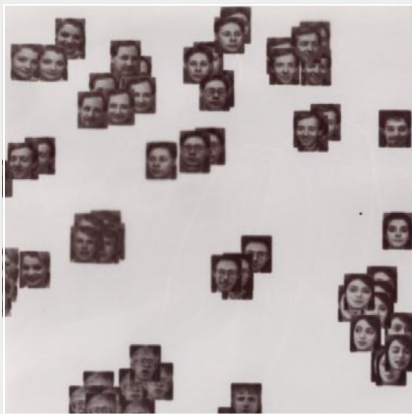
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Briefing: Targeted advertising and profiling in the *Privacy Act Review* – Are we going far enough?

21 September, 2023

This policy briefing reflects discussions held in a roundtable of 16 policy experts around privacy, human rights and consumer law on the 4th September 2023. The event was held under Chatham House Rules, and this briefing presents an overview of the discussion. The roundtable was prompted by proposals put forward in the *Privacy Act Review* and the significant pushback from adtech and media against these reforms. Specifically:

The *Privacy Act Review* makes a number of proposals that would curb targeted advertising and its associated profiling.

— Proposal 20.3 provides 'individuals with an unqualified right to opt-out of receiving targeted advertising', and;

— Proposals 20.2 provides individuals 'with an unqualified right to opt-out of their personal information being used or disclosed for direct marketing purposes. Similar to the existing requirements under the Act, entities would still be able to collect personal information for direct marketing without consent, provided it is not sensitive information and the individual has the ability to opt-out'. These proposals **align with existing requirements in EU regulation and legislation in some US states**, specifically California, Colorado, Texas and Montana, which, combined, cover 20% of the US population.

Key Activities

1. Rapid Roundtables

— *Prohibiting targeting to children and children's best interests: can the two co-exist?*

Briefing: Prohibiting targeting to children and children's best interests: Can the two coexist?

18 October, 2023

The proposal in the *Privacy Act Review* is to prohibit targeting to a child, with an exception for targeting that is in the child's best interests. This is consistent with an emerging trend to apply the best interests principle to digital regulation to advance children's rights, which is reinforced in the *Privacy Act Review* by proposal 16.5 (to developed a Children's Privacy Code to reinforce how the best interests of children should be supported in the design of an online service) and proposal 16.4 (to include considerations of children's best interests when deciding if the collection, use and disclosure of information is fair and reasonable).

The proposal for a Code has been agreed, and the proposal to consider children's best interests in fair and reasonable assessments has been agreed-in principle. This suggests that over time, understanding what is in children's best interests within the privacy framework will become increasingly important for regulators, industry and children themselves.

Against this backdrop, Reset.Tech Australia convened a policy roundtable of 17 experts, with expertise across child rights, privacy and research, to explore the proposals for a prohibition of targeting children except where it is in children's best interests. Three key questions about the proposal provoked the discussion:

1. How do we make sense of the best interests principle in a digital context?

2. Targeting children in the *Privacy Act*: what does this mean?

3. European approaches to targeting children: are they in their best interests?

Key Activities

1. Rapid Roundtables

— *Legislative interventions on misinformation and disinformation – what comes next for Australia?* With Human Rights Law Centre and Monash University

Policy briefing: Misinformation and disinformation regulatory frameworks

3 November, 2023

This report summarises a policy roundtable held with 15 experts, unpacking legislative and regulatory interventions around misinformation and disinformation in the context of the *Combatting Misinformation and Disinformation Bill* (the Bill).

The discussion noted issues with the existing regulatory framework, based on Digi's *Australian Code of Practice on Disinformation and Misinformation* (the Code). The existing framework does not adequately create accountability, transparency nor comply with human rights principles. Fundamentally, because the Code is drafted and overseen by industry, there are insufficient incentives to improve practice.

The Bill requires meaningful adjustment in order to achieve its admirable ambition.

This paper recommends:

Reframing the Bill, focusing on how the Bill will enhance public oversight. This includes oversight over any measures deployed by social media platforms that may affect freedom of speech.

Considering the implications of the existing *Privacy Act Review* and upcoming *Online Safety Act Review*, especially with regard to consumer opt-outs and risk assessments.

Ensuring ACMA is adequately resourced to deliver effective changes.

Ensuring ACMA has adequate powers to deliver accountability, especially through the levels of civil penalties resulting from breaches.

Key Activities

2. Research & Investigations

— *Realising young people's rights in the digital environment*

Funded by the Internet Society Foundation, Reset.Tech Australia delivered a series of original research and policy outputs bringing young people's wishes about privacy to life across four jurisdictions: Australia, Antigua & Barbuda, Ghana, and Slovenia.

The research consistently revealed that young people hold nuanced understandings of digital privacy and want to see their rights protected.

Report: Realising young people's rights in the digital environment
27 July, 2023

Young people hold nuanced and sophisticated understandings about what privacy means in a digital context. They see online privacy as a right, but a right that is frequently and routinely violated. Despite this, online privacy is still understood as important and desirable.

Young people want to see fundamental changes to the policy landscape to ensure their rights are prioritised.

This has implications for policy makers as they review the *Privacy Act* 1988. Specifically, it lends support to proposals:

— 4.1 and 4.3; amending the definition of privacy to include metadata and inferred data like digital profiles

— 10.2 and 16.3; requiring privacy policies and collection notices to be clear and understandable, including for children

— 16.2; continuing to use current 'age of consent' guidelines

— 16.4; requiring companies to consider the best interests of children when deciding if data collection, use or disclosure is fair and reasonable

It also has some potential learnings for the next *Online Safety Act* review too.

This report documents findings of mixed methods research undertaken with young people across Australia aged 13-18 between 2022 and 2023. It documents themes that emerged across a wide range of research activities and outputs, and prioritises the words of young people themselves as much as possible.

With kind thanks to the Internet Society Foundation for supporting this work.

Key Activities

2. Research & Investigations

— *Intrusive and unhelpful: targeted advertising in Australia*

Reset.Tech Australia undertook polling research to explore how Australians feel about the online targeting practices that digital industry coalitions are fighting hard to retain.

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Report: Intrusive and Unhelpful – Targeted Advertising in Australia
14 September, 2023

— Targeted advertising—known elsewhere as behavioural advertising, personalised advertising, or surveillance advertising—is in the crosshairs of Australian lawmakers. Draft legislation is expected from the Australian Government to substantially update the *Privacy Act* for modern and digital life. Working with YouGov, we polled **1,063 Australians** to ask their opinions about targeted advertising and what they'd like to see changed under a revised *Privacy Act*.

— *Australians find targeted ads intrusive, not helpful.* Adtech companies often describe targeted advertising as helpfulto consumers. However, only **20 percent** of people find targeted advertising very or somewhat helpful, while **73 percent** find them very or somewhat intrusive. These intrusions are pervasive: **73 percent** of respondents also said they often receive targeted ads for things they found themselves *"just thinking about"*.

— *There is widespread support for choice around targeted advertising.* **93 percent support** the proposals that require digital platforms to provide people with the choice to opt-out of targeted advertising if they wish. Further, **82 percent** say they would take up the opportunity to opt-out of targeted ads if the choice were available.

— *People want less data collected and used for advertising.* **90 percent** would prefer less information about them was collected for advertising purposes. **87 percent** would prefer ads not target them based on sensitive personal information, about, for example, their political views, sexuality, or health. 84 percent would prefer ads not target them based on their online browsing history.

Key Activities

2. Research & Investigations

Susan McKinnon Foundation

Monitoring the Efficacy of Platform Measures: Australian Referendum

Funded by the Susan McKinnon Foundation, Reset. Tech Australia designed a comprehensive research project to test the efficacy of the *Australian Code of Practice on Misinformation and Disinformation* throughout the referendum. Drawing on methodologies deployed across the global Reset network, we designed a monitoring schema and a series of experiments to evaluate platform mitigation and response efforts to misinformation and disinformation.

Where escalation was necessary, we took evidence of breaches through both platform intermediation and independent complaints mechanisms. These processes also offer empirical findings on Australia's current platform transparency and accountability frameworks.

Key Activities

2. Research & Investigations

Content moderation evaluation report:

1. *How do platforms respond to user-reports of electoral process misinformation? An experimental evaluation from the lead-up to Australia's referendum*

Report: Electoral process misinformation
7 September, 2023

This rapid investigation set out to explore whether platforms remove electoral process misinformation when they are made aware of it via user-reporting. We found, reported and monitored a small number of posts on TikTok (25), Facebook (24) and X, formerly Twitter (50), that contained clear electoral process misinformation. This content largely centred around claims that Australian elections had been rigged, that ballots had or would be stolen, or that the Voice referendum vote was invalid or illegal.

Electoral process misinformation stands to harm both the Yes and No campaigns.

According to each platform's community guidelines, this type of content, once detected, should be:

— TikTok: Removed.

— Facebook: Demoted in prevalence.

— X: Either removed or labelled.

However, we found that none of the platforms are effectively enforcing their community guidelines, nor are they implementing meaningful responses based on their requirements under the *Australian Code of Practice on Disinformation and Misinformation*. Specifically:

1. Platforms appear to have few effective 'organic' content moderation processes to detect and respond to electoral process misinformation and disinformation.

2. Reporting electoral process misinformation appears to make little difference on Facebook and X, while it makes a moderate difference on TikTok.

3. Electoral process misinformation continues to grow in reach even after reporting, which suggests that it is not adequately being de-amplified. Growth accelerates slowly after reporting on TikTok, but it decelerates significantly on Facebook.

Key Activities

2. Research & Investigations

Content moderation evaluation report:

2. *Is content over- or under-moderated in the Voice referendum debate? An experimental evaluation*

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Report: Is political content over– or under–moderated?

11 October, 2023

Content moderation on social media can result in the removal, demotion or labelling of content that platforms deem to have violated their rules. Moderation is an important tool in mitigating systemic risks on platforms, especially when it comes from misinformation and disinformation. However, if moderation goes wrong, it can lead to content being either over-moderated (too much being inappropriately taken down) or under-moderation (not enough content that violates platform's rules being taken down). Platforms can also create conditions of potential political bias if they over- or under-moderate in particular ways.

This research set out to see if the content moderation systems of three major platforms—TikTok, Facebook and X—was over- or under-moderated, and if it displayed political bias when it came to content relating to the Voice referendum in Australia. We tested for differing levels of 'over-moderation', or where platforms had inappropriately removed, demoted or labelled Yes-aligned or No-aligned content. We also examined differing levels of 'under-moderation', which involved instances where platforms had failed to remove, demote or label misleading Yes-aligned or No-aligned content that violated their guidelines. Subsequently, we uncovered the following findings:

— Over-moderation: we found limited evidence of platform over-moderation. The techniques used in this research encourage overestimation, but even these overestimates ranged from 0.25% on Facebook to 2% on X. There is limited evidence of bias, however, we found X may over-moderate #VoteNo content, and Facebook appears to favour #VoteNo content in its video recommender algorithm to a five-fold magnitude.

Key Activities

2. Research & Investigations

— **Advertising approvals evaluation report**

How do platforms handle electoral misinformation in paid-for advertising? An experimental evaluation using the Voice referendum

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Report: Misinformation in paid-for advertising
24 September, 2023

There are significant gaps in Australia's regulatory framework when it comes to electoral misinformation and disinformation served through paid-for advertising. This creates notable vulnerabilities in Australia's online information architecture, such as the growing problem of threats to electoral integrity.

This small research piece demonstrates issues with platform responses to electoral misinformation served through paid-for advertising and weaknesses in platform transparency reports to the *Australian Code of Practice on Disinformation and Misinformation* (the Code).

We put forward a range of paid-for ads containing explicit electoral misinformation for approval to run on Facebook, TikTok and X(Twitter). We found the following:

— TikTok's system appeared to catch some political advertising and misinformation, but not the majority. We submitted ten ads containing paid-for misinformation to test TikTok's ad approval system, and 70% were approved. TikTok approved seven ads, rejected one ad and did not review the final two after detecting the violating ad.

— Facebook's system appeared entirely dependent on an advertiser's self-declarations regarding the nature of the advertising, which evidently offers insufficient protection against bad actors. We submitted twenty ads containing paid-for misinformation to test Meta's ad approval system, and 95% were approved. Meta approved all nineteen ads that were not self-identified as 'political ads', rejecting only one ad that we had voluntarily identified as a political ad.

Key Activities

2. Research & Investigations

— **Recommender systems investigation report**

How do platforms' recommender systems promote political content? An experimental investigation using the Voice referendum

Report: Misinformation in paid-for advertising
5 October, 2023
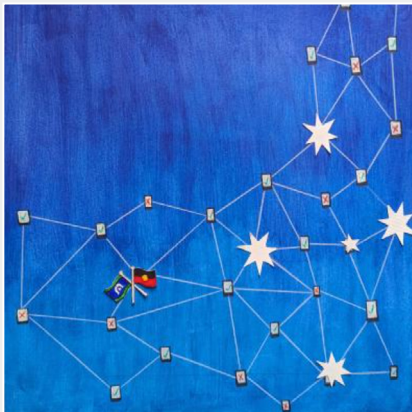
Digital platforms are shaping the landscape of Australian political discourse. While significant attention is rightly paid to how platforms influence political discourse through content moderation and policies around misinformation and disinformation, they also shape political discourse through the development and deployment of algorithms in content recommender systems.

Recommender systems can distort political debate by promoting extremist or dangerous content, but can also shape debate by pushing one-sided or partisan content to users. This is often described as the 'filter bubble' effect or as social media 'rabbit holes', which can damage the plurality of the content people consume.

This research explores the effect of social media algorithms on political content promotion concerning the Voice referendum in Australia. We set up sock puppets (or 'fake accounts') on TikTok and X (formerly Twitter) to observe the rate at which these accounts fell into 'Yes' or 'No' filter bubbles.

Our findings include the following:

— On TikTok: We primed four sock puppet accounts. Two of them fell into strong 'No' filter bubbles within 400 videos. One fell into a 'Yes' filter bubble within 250 videos, and one failed to fall into a filter bubble.

— On X (formerly Twitter): We primed two sock puppet accounts, with one falling into a 'No' filter bubble after around 300 Xs (tweets) and the other into a 'Yes' filter bubble after around 200 Xs.
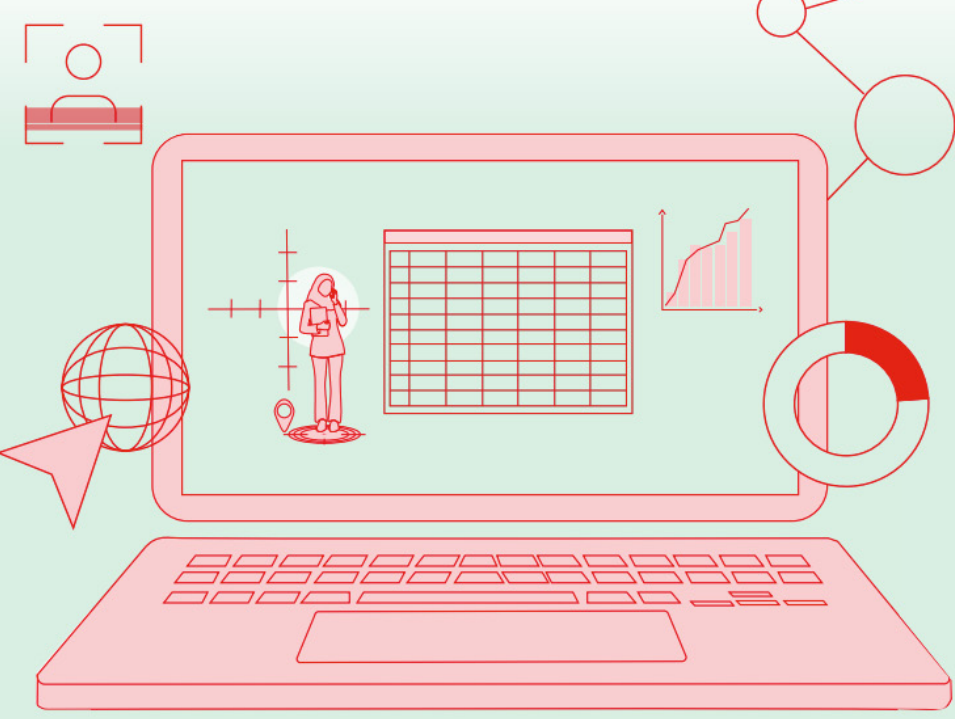
Key Activities

2. Research & Investigations

**'Australians for Sale'
in the Xandr File**

We worked with research partners to bring the secretive 'Xandr File' into the light, revealing the types of data that are traded on Australians and how extractive data business models feed the beast of targeted advertising.

In tandem, we released a podcast series and animation as approachable resources for the public to learn more about this complex area of policy.

Australians for Sale

Targeted Advertising, Data Brokering, and Consumer Manipulation

Dr Susie Alegre with contributions from Wolfie Christl (Cracked Labs)
December 2023

Key Activities

2. Research & Investigations

— **Report on the Xandr dataset's role in consumer manipulation of vulnerable Australians**
With research from Wolfie Christl and analysis from Susie Alegre

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Report "Australians for Sale: Targeted Advertising, Data Brokering and Consumer Manipulation"

5 December, 2023
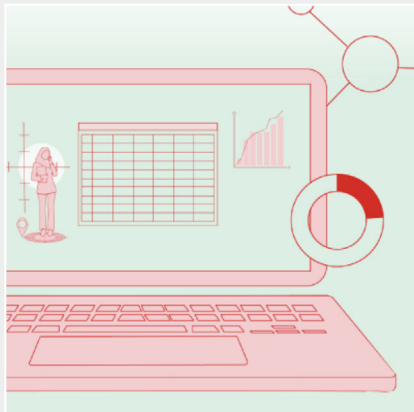
This report documents the nature of some of the more troubling consumer manipulation practices currently occurring in Australia. It explores how targeted advertising affects people who gamble, consume alcohol, are experiencing financial stress, and how it affects children and young people. Each case study describes potential consumer harm and rights violations and goes on to include evidence from the 'Xandr File' about the nature of data that is routinely traded for targeted advertising about each of these groups.

The Xandr File is a data set made briefly public in 2021 by Microsoft that lists the 'audience segments' (or characteristics) that data brokers hold about Australians. These characteristics are largely gathered from online behaviour, although some are gathered from 'geolocation' tracking of where your mobile phone goes and are tied to digital identifiers that data brokers use to identify individuals. Xandr contains segments provided by multiple data brokers, which sometimes resell data from other data brokers. It represents just a glimpse of all the data that is secretly generated and held about Australians.

A brave, bold and strong response to this issue is necessary, and long overdue.
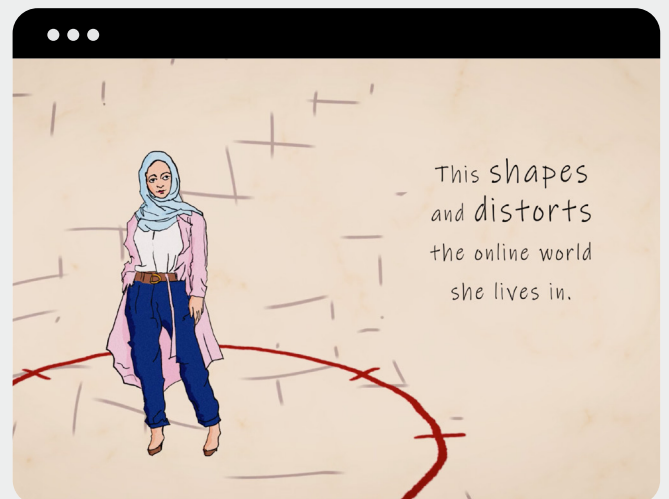
Key Activities

2. Research & Investigations

— Podcast series with Johnny
   Ryan, Josh Golin, and Susie
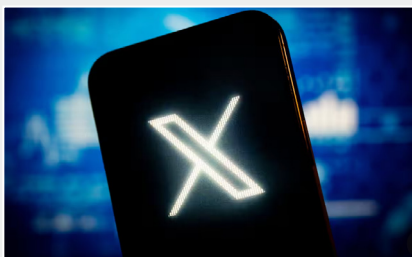   Alegre, on the harms of
   targeted advertising.
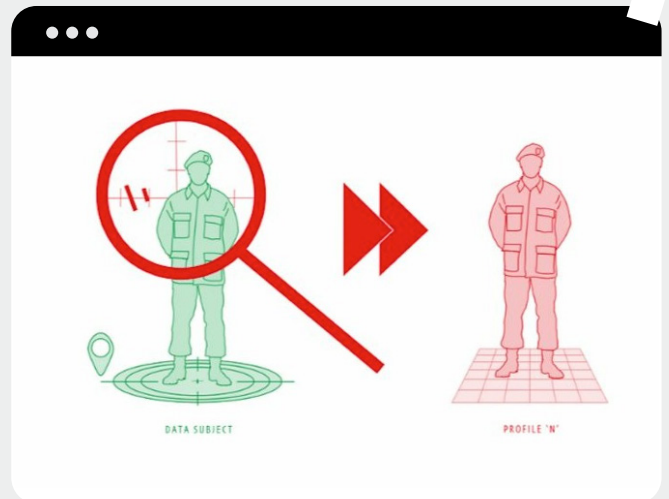
— Animation project making
   the practices of data
   brokering real.

Key Activities

3. Enforcement

— Complaint about X to the *Australian Code of Practice on Disinformation and Misinformation*

Elon Musk's X reprimanded after disinformation safety feature scrapped

Posted Tue 28 Nov 2023 at 10:17am

An independent committee has found that X, formerly Twitter, was in breach of Australia's voluntary misinformation and disinformation code, and has withdrawn it as a signatory.

Key points:

■ X removed the mechanism for reporting misinformation posted on its platform

■ The ability to report misinformation is a key tenet of the ACPDM code

■ The code is voluntary

Australia news

'Serious breach': social media platform X booted from Australia's misinformation code

Company failed to respond to a complaint about the removal of a function to report misinformation during the voice referendum

Josh Taylor

🐦 @joshgnosis
Mon 27 Nov 2023 18.01 AEDT

Key Activities

4. Policy Impact

— **Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee**, *Administration of the referendum into an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice*

The Senate

Finance and Public Administration References Committee

Administration of the referendum into an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice

Challenges in the online referendum debate

5.44 – The proper conduct of civil debate and the dissemination of factual, relevant, and reliable information to the voting public underpins any successful electoral event in a liberal democracy.

5.45 – The committee recognises that much of the current referendum debate will occur in a lightly and predominantly self-regulated online environment.

5.46 – Evidence to the committee indicated that the current online regulatory framework is insufficient to prevent the heightened dissemination of misinformation, disinformation, and racially abusive material during the referendum campaign.

5.48 – While not part of the committee's initial terms of reference, the committee considers that it would be useful for the government to commission a review into the current online regulatory framework noting that few of the regulations and codes that apply to traditional media apply to the social media platforms.

Key Activities

4. Policy Impact

— **Senate Economics References Committee,** *Influence of international digital platforms*

The Senate

———————————

Economics References Committee

———————————

Influence of international digital platforms

Dark patterns

4.51 – Australian research found that young people are especially vulnerable to dark patterns. Reset.Tech Australia explained the prevalence of dark patterns employed in apps popular with young people to confuse users and obtain data.

Bias and discrimination (hate speech/online hate)

6.24 – Reset.Tech Australia highlighted the limitations of current legislation, noting: "Regulation focuses on individual pieces of content, and overlooks the role of platforms in promoting harmful content to children (via algorithms, for example). Hate speech, mis & disinformation are not adequately addressed in the current framework, but can be harmful.

Digital platforms, data, and children

8.9 – Many submitters raised concerns about the quantity of children's data being collected by digital platforms. Ms Alice Dawkins, Executive Director at Reset.Tech Australia, emphasised the volume of data collection for the intention of marketing to children.

8.10 – Ms Dawkins added that children's data is collected from multiple sources of interaction with digital platforms. This not only includes social interaction, but also education interaction, emphasising that regulation of digital platform data collection practices is not currently effective.

Key Activities

4. Policy Impact

— **Senate Economics References Committee,** *Influence of international digital platforms*

The Senate

Economics References Committee

Influence of international digital platforms

Regulatory gaps

8.51 – Several submissions highlighted that fragmentation of regulations has resulted in regulatory gaps.

8.52 – Reset.Tech Australia commented that issues surrounding children's rights, especially privacy, engagement with harmful communities and data, are currently overlooked.

Ineffective self-regulation

8.61 – Reset.Tech Australia also argued the weakness of co-regulation is demonstrated by the limited protections in Australia as compared to other children's codes in the United Kingdom (UK), Ireland and California. Reset.Tech Australia recommended not registering co-regulatory codes in future, and progressively replacing self or co-regulatory codes with mandatory regulations.

A strong regulator

8.83 – The committee heard that any regulation should be overseen by an independent public regulator and be adequately resourced so it can be 'sufficiently muscular'.

Best interests of the child

8.92 – Reset.Tech submitted best interests should be considered in data collection and processing.

Key Activities

4. Policy Impact

— *Privacy Act Review* report

Recognising the sensitivity of location tracking data

Reset Australia provided feedback to the *Privacy Legislation Amendment (Enhancing Online Privacy and Other Measures)* Bill 2021 ('OP Bill') consultation on behalf of children and young people, which highlighted that children also share concerns about how their location data is handled.

Children's privacy

Australian children and young people also reflected these concerns. Reset Australia's submission to the OP Bill on behalf of children and young people provided poll findings from 16 and 17 year old Australians about the handling of their data. 80 per cent of respondents agreed that more rules should be in place to limit how the data of people under 18 is collected and used and 82 per cent of young people had encountered advertising that was targeted in a way that made them feel uncomfortable.

Exploitation of people experiencing vulnerability and children

A submission by Reset Australia reflecting the views of children and young people to the draft OP Bill cited a young person as stating:

When I started using Instagram more, the platform collected enough data to know I'm a young woman, and began targeting me with fashion, beauty, and fitness content. My feed became flooded with that type of content, and then, I started receiving more dieting and cosmetic procedure videos.

Selected Media Coverage

THE AUSTRALIAN
HOME / BUSINESS / MEDIA
Self regulation of fake news is not working, research says
By CAMERON ENGLAND
12:30AM SEPTEMBER 11, 2023

The Policymaker
Combatting misinformation and disinformation through more effective regulation
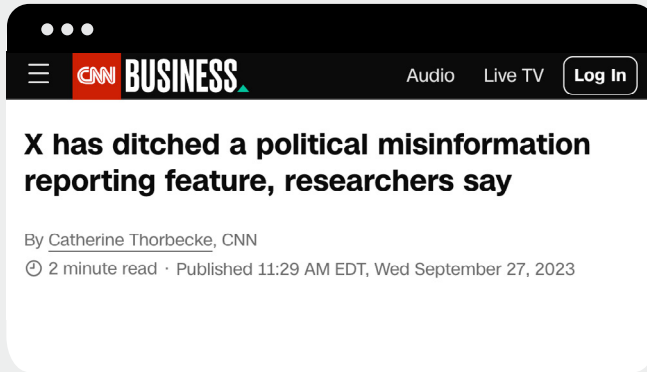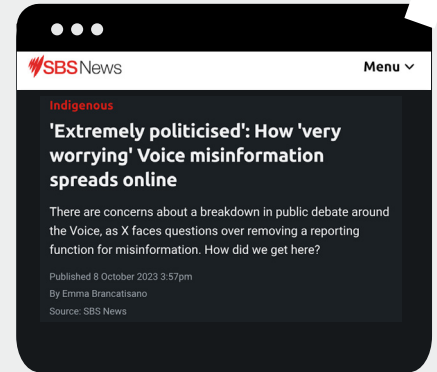Alice Dawkins   Rys Farthing
Australia's referendum on the Voice has highlighted the need for better regulation of social media platforms to prevent falsehoods corroding our democratic discourse.

ABC NEWS
Just In   Watch Live   Politics   World   Business   Analysis
Voice to Parliament referendum 'prime target' for foreign interference on Elon Musk's X, former executive warns
ABC Investigations /
Exclusive by Pat McGrath, Kevin Nguyen and Michael Workman
Posted Sat 30 Sep 2023 at 4:45am, updated Mon 2 Oct 2023 at 9:28am

ABC NEWS
Why the Voice failed
As Australians begin to comprehend the defeat of the Indigenous Voice referendum, First Nations people are beginning to feel the collective weight of the decision.
By Kirstie Wellauer, Carly Williams, and Bridget Brennan
Published 16 Oct 2023, 2:00am

The Canberra Times   Opinion
Alice Dawkins and Rys Farthing | Electoral misinformation is a threat to Australia's democracy
By Alice Dawkins and Rys Farthing
Updated September 12 2023 - 4:06am, first published 3:30am

AIPS   Australian Institute of Policy & Science
/ AQ Magazine /
AQ: Australian Quarterly 94.4 – Oct-Dec 2023
Choice as the New, Contested Frontier: Personal Data and Targeted Advertising
Australia's privacy protections have long been due for an overhaul. Drafted before the internet was even public, our 1988 *Privacy Act* was not built to handle the complex and complicated data flows that now define our digital ecosystem. Practices that have become toxic staples in the digital world, like the pernicious collection of metadata, aren't even mentioned in the *Privacy Act*, let alone properly governed." Reform is clearly needed, and is coming.
Rys Farthing, Aruna Anderson & Alice Dawkins

Selected Media Coverage

CNN BUSINESS · Audio · Live TV · Log In

X has ditched a political misinformation reporting feature, researchers say

By Catherine Thorbecke, CNN
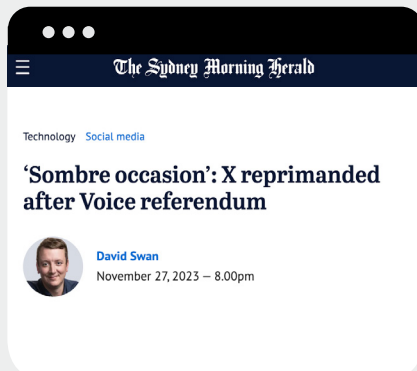2 minute read · Published 11:29 AM EDT, Wed September 27, 2023

SBS News Menu

Indigenous

'Extremely politicised': How 'very worrying' Voice misinformation spreads online

There are concerns about a breakdown in public debate around the Voice, as X faces questions over removing a reporting function for misinformation. How did we get here?

Published 8 October 2023 3:57pm
By Emma Brancatisano
Source: SBS News

The Sydney Morning Herald

Technology · Social media

'Sombre occasion': X reprimanded after Voice referendum

David Swan
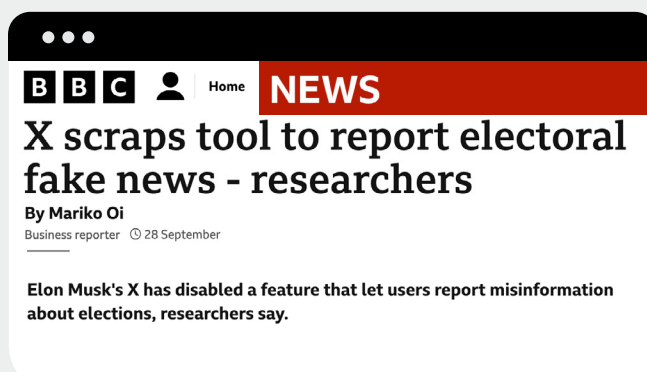November 27, 2023 — 8.00pm

REUTERS

My View · Following · Saved

Asia Pacific

Australia's Indigenous Voice referendum faces misinformation linked to COVID influencers

By **Byron Kaye**
September 7, 2023 6:00 PM GMT+8 · Updated 3 months ago

BBC Home **NEWS**

X scraps tool to report electoral fake news - researchers

By **Mariko Oi**
Business reporter · 28 September

Elon Musk's X has disabled a feature that let users report misinformation about elections, researchers say.

The Guardian
A decade of making a difference

Australia fined X $610,500. But will Elon Musk's company pay up?

'There are three key drivers to get companies to change their behaviour: reputation, regulation and revenue,' the e-safety commissioner says

Josh Taylor
@joshgnosis
Thu 19 Oct 2023 09.30 AEDT

How we work

2023 marked a full transition from our initial host agency, into a standalone independently governed entity.

— **Reset.Tech Australia Limited**

  Board Members:
  Ben Scott
  Poppy Wood
  Rys Farthing
  Alice Dawkins

— Core Australia programmatic team:

  Alice Dawkins
  Executive Director and Chair of Board
  Rys Farthing
  Research and Policy Director
  Aruna Anderson
  Policy Advisor

— Harm Prevention:

  As of November 2023, Reset.Tech Australia is proud to be included on the *Register of Harm Prevention Charities,* meaning that Reset.Tech Australia can receive tax-deductible donations.

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