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## **Treat Facebook and Google like media companies**

Digital giants like Google, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube should be regulated like other media companies and forced to contribute a percentage of their revenue towards public interest journalism, says the union for Australian media workers.

In a submission to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's digital platforms inquiry, the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance says Google and Facebook can no longer pretend to not be media companies, and their impact on traditional publishers and broadcasters needs to be curbed.

Facebook and Google mimic media companies by acting as a network to distribute news content, and a platform for advertising, says MEAA.

Digital platforms draw audiences through the free use of content generated by media organisations, while the migration of advertising to the two digital giants has undermined the viability of established publishers and broadcasters.

Nor are they bound by the same regulations as media companies in ensuring that offensive, false, defamatory and other harmful content is not displayed.

"Facebook and Google can no longer maintain the pretence that they are not media companies, and they should be treated as such," said MEAA chief executive Paul Murphy.

"News media companies now have a dependence on digital platforms to drive traffic to their websites, yet the relationship is severely imbalanced.

"The digital platforms deny they are media companies, yet have managed to monetise the carriage of news items in ways that have created despair across the Australian media sector.

"Quite clearly, without access to that content for free, the business models of digital platforms would not work.

"In the absence of Australian publishers and content creators being reasonably compensated for the use of their content, either an access-per-user charge or a percentage of revenue charge should be levied on Facebook and Google.

"This revenue could then be retained in a contestable fund that could be used to support public interest journalism."

Growing concerns about the prevalence of fake news and propaganda, the inappropriate leaking of individual consumer's data, and failure to curb online bullying and offensive content all lead to the conclusion that Facebook and Google should be regulated similarly to broadcasters by the Australian Communications and Media Authority, says MEAA.

Other recommendations in the MEAA submission include that the government should consider increasing maximum penalties for mass privacy/data breaches, and that consumers be provided with plain language information about how algorithms are used to determine what news content they see on digital platforms like Facebook.

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