

'Failure of trust': Why regulators need to get tough on Facebook and Google

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Two leading Australian digital media experts have backed proposed tougher regulations for digital platforms, saying the public has lost faith in tech giants like Facebook and Google.

QUT's Professor Terry Flew and University of Sydney's Associate Professor Tim Dwyer were among 86 people and organisations to make submissions to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) in response to its recent Digital Platform Inquiry.

The submissions to the inquiry's [preliminary report](#) have now been made public.

"Digital platform companies are increasingly like [media companies](#) that share news and they need to be regulated as such," Professor Flew said.

"The 'techlash' we are seeing from the general public shows there is growing community concern and we welcome the ACCC's regulatory proposals."

The submissions also included one from Google, which argued it didn't need any extra regulating.

But Professor Flew and Professor Dwyer disagree.

In their submission to the ACCC, the pair highlighted a "failure of trust" and provided four main arguments for regulatory changes:

1. Digital platform companies are increasingly acting as 'media-like' companies.
2. There's a regulatory imbalance between traditional media companies and [digital platforms](#).
3. A new unified and [regulatory framework](#) will provide regulatory certainty for new players and existing ones.
4. A united [platform](#)-neutral regulatory framework is in the public interest and will give greater confidence to the public in areas including the accuracy of news and ethical standards.

"There is a growing awareness of the possibilities, and indeed need, for regulating digital and social media platforms," Professors Flew and Dwyer wrote.

"A steady stream of scandals in relation to Facebook and Google sharing [personal data](#) with third parties, the growing evidence of Russian hacking of the 2016 US Presidential elections, and the role of the boutique data analytics firm, Cambridge Analytica, contributed to this shift in awareness of the role these platforms are playing in our lives.

"There's a pervading sense that the 'Tech Giants' have betrayed our trust arising from their role in spreading misinformation and the manipulation of breaking news. This failure of trust has been seen most acutely in algorithmic news provision and its implications for media pluralism. Examples include the ways in which third party actors are involved in online news manipulation and strategies of disinformation in the context of elections, or the more prosaic practices of news recommender algorithms, including YouTube's 'Up Next' recommender."

More information: Digital Platforms Inquiry: Preliminary report: www.accc.gov.au/system/files/ACCC%20Digital%20Platforms%20Inquiry%20-%20Preliminary%20Report.pdf

Platform Governance: Rethinking Internet Regulation as Media Policy. [research.qut.edu.au/dmrc/proje ... platform-governance/](http://research.qut.edu.au/dmrc/proje...platform-governance/)

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