

BRIEFING NOTE TO ADDRESS CANADA'S INFORMATION CRISIS THROUGH ONLINE PLATFORM REGULATION

Purpose:

This briefing note presents options and a recommendation to address the growing threat of online platforms in Canada by regulating the power that the platforms have. This proposal aims to ensure that the power of online platforms, as well as the spread of misinformation in Canada, is weakened while maintaining national identity and sovereignty.

Background:

With the rise of far right-wing ideologies in the United States through the current presidency of Donald Trump and Department of Government Efficiency Head Elon Musk, the spread of misinformation through online platforms has grown exponentially. These platforms have unprecedented power in modern times, mainly their ability to disseminate information to a wide group of people nationwide. President Donald Trump's second term has cultivated a genre of right-wing media meant to divide Canada through its rhetoric and messaging from U.S. media streams. For example, Meta's ban on Canadian news across their platforms has seen the rise of right-wing media and online disinformation. Therefore, by reviewing options to help quell platform power, Canada can help address the information crisis while ensuring that these policies align with the needs of Canadian citizens. The upcoming election and President Trump's attacks on Canada demands greater attention on this issue, making this a priority for the nation.

Current Situation:

- **The Online News Act and Online Streaming Act:** The Online News Act instructed online platforms to pay smaller news businesses for showcasing their content, while the Online Streaming Act awards points based on how many Canadians are involved in the production of content and also tasking platforms to give more importance to Canadian content. However, the provisions laid out by the two Acts and its attempts on regulation have caused online platforms to outright remove Canadian news from its feeds. This has affected Canadian news networks and information dissemination in Canada.
- **Removal of Moderation on X and Meta:** Elon Musk, owner of X (FKA Twitter), and Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Meta, have implemented initiatives to remove content moderation on their sites. The removal of their moderation teams has seen more right-wing media alongside misinformation and untruthful information being shared across platforms.
- **President Trump's Second Term:** President Trump's second term has seen the rise of right-wing media and disinformation. Coupled with the lack of moderation and fact-checking on platforms, his rhetoric has given more attention to misinformation in Canada and the US.

Options:

Option 1: Introduce a new piece of legislation that imposes regulations on platforms and their reach.

- The advantage of this option is that it will put pressure on online tech platforms in Canada, thereby reducing the spread of misinformation across platforms. It will make regulations on online platforms law.
- The disadvantage of this option is that it is already too similar to the Online News Act, with slight alterations to its text. By focusing on creating legislation to regulate content, platforms will possibly remove their presence in Canada.

Option 2: Create an entirely new commission which oversees the actions of online platforms that is separate from the CRTC.

- The advantage of this option is that the commission would look strictly at online platforms such as X and Meta, and monitor their actions in content moderation. It will operate as an independent, bipartisan body in the interest of Canadians. It will also be a chance for online platforms to coordinate with the federal government on content moderation.
- The disadvantage of this option is the increased bureaucracy attached with an overseeing body of online platforms. Additionally, this option will require funding from the federal government to operate. While this commission is tasked with coordinating with online platforms, it does not directly create regulations on content for online platforms.

Option 3: Introduce amendments to the Online News Act and Online Streaming Act that removes payment to smaller news organizations from larger online platforms, as well as the removal of the points based system.

- The advantage of this option is that for a piece of media to be considered Canadian content, it will no longer need to adhere to a points based system, while also changing the monetary compensation that platforms will have to pay to smaller news organizations. It will also revamp regulations to better define what Canadian content is. Without the need to adhere to a points system for Canadian content, platforms will have a better understanding of what constitutes that type of content. Additionally, online platforms will not have to pay news organization for showcasing their content.
- The disadvantage of this option is that many smaller news organizations will lose funding and royalties from larger platforms that showcase their content. While this program is targeted specifically towards the Online News Act, it does not incentivize them to reintegrate Canadian news.

Recommendation:

Option 2 is recommended.

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