

Australia stops short of major clampdown on Facebook, Google

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Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said a taskforce would be created to monitor tech giants and take enforcement action

Australia's government on Thursday announced a new taskforce to

monitor the actions of tech giants such as Facebook and Google but stopped short of a major clampdown recommended by the country's consumer watchdog.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) had called for new regulations to rein in the power of digital behemoths amid global concerns ranging from anti-trust issues to privacy abuse, and their role in spreading disinformation and hateful content.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison said Thursday several of the watchdog's 23 recommendations would be implemented, including the creation of a new ACCC taskforce to monitor tech giants and "take enforcement action as necessary".

He also said the government will review privacy laws to protect consumers.

But Morrison said stronger proposals to police some of the 21st century's biggest corporate titans would "need further consideration and engagement" given the "complexity of the issues and the potential to have economy-wide effects".

They included opening up commercially sensitive algorithms to outside scrutiny and introducing "sufficiently large sanctions" to deter platforms from misusing data or spreading disinformation.

Google and Facebook have had a huge impact on Australia's news industry, with the number of newspaper and online journalists falling more than 20 percent since 2014, as digital advertising revenues were overwhelmingly captured by the two tech titans.

Morrison directed the ACCC to work with [tech giants](#) and [media companies](#) on the creation of a voluntary code of conduct to "address

bargaining power imbalances" between the two sides.

The measures follow an 18-month inquiry into the power of digital platforms by the ACCC, which welcomed the government's response Thursday.

"The world is waking up to the very real harms that stem from the power the digital platforms hold in our society and for our economy," ACCC chair Rod Sims said.

DIGI—a lobby group for tech companies including Facebook, Google, Twitter—said it would be "studying the proposals in detail to ensure that the consumer protections are fit for a digital era, and that there are no unintended consequences for Australia's digital future, economic growth and global competitiveness".

An estimated 17 million Australians use Facebook each month and spend an average of 30 minutes on the platform a day, while 98 percent of Australian mobile searches use Google.

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