

Social media exploitation erodes trust

October 9 2020



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Social media platforms in Australia are vulnerable to exploitation by foreign actors for commercial, political, and strategic reasons, according to new analysis.

A review published in the [ANU Policy Options Paper](#), outlines why

Australian national security agencies should play close attention to manipulative digital technologies and develop policies which limit the risks posed by them to better protect consumer rights, industrial designs, technology standards, [public education](#), and media policy.

Dr. Zac Rogers, Research Leader at the Jeff Bleich Center for the US Alliance in Digital Technology, Security and Governance says shifting power balances in international geopolitics are part of normal cycles, but this is the first time conflicting interests are waging war in an online environment which directly enables their behavior.

"Trust—as the bedrock of a convention-based society—has become a key battleground between states. It should be understood and protected as a strategic resource. The manipulative algorithms on social platforms is the business model—they oppose any constraint or regulation at all costs. While the only record of foreign disinformation is what's available on the platform in many cases. If it was closed off there would be no way to watch and learn and the national security agencies that subpoena these companies for data would lose out. Foreign adversaries also benefit from the social and political vulnerabilities the normal daily use of these technologies exacerbates within democracies. Manipulative technologies can weaken [public trust](#) in institutions and deplete the social capital which upholds our society."

Regulating digital platforms to ensure that trust is maintained should be a priority for government and [government policies](#) related to the digital economy and the government's own use of platforms and data must defend trust.

Dr. Rogers says the government can take further steps to address the ongoing impact of technology on the public despite being forced to provide services in direct competition against offerings from digital giants like Apple and Google.

"One way to better align often disparate lines of effort across government would be to create specialist strategic engagement roles. These positions would be charged with building relationships and collaborations across portfolios responsible for policy issues related to digital platforms. All of these things can help mitigate the dark side of today's pervasively manipulative digital ecosystem and help move towards a better one in the long term. Critically, it will also help close off opportunities for foreign adversaries to exploit, manipulate or subvert commercial and government data and [digital platforms](#)."

More information: The Strategic Implications of Manipulative Digital Platforms: A Trust-Driven Approach. [nsc.crawford.anu.edu.au/public ... rust-driven-approach](https://nsc.crawford.anu.edu.au/publications/2020-10-social-media-exploitation-erodes-trust-driven-approach)

Provided by Flinders University

Citation: Social media exploitation erodes trust (2020, October 9) retrieved 8 December 2023 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2020-10-social-media-exploitation-erodes.html>

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