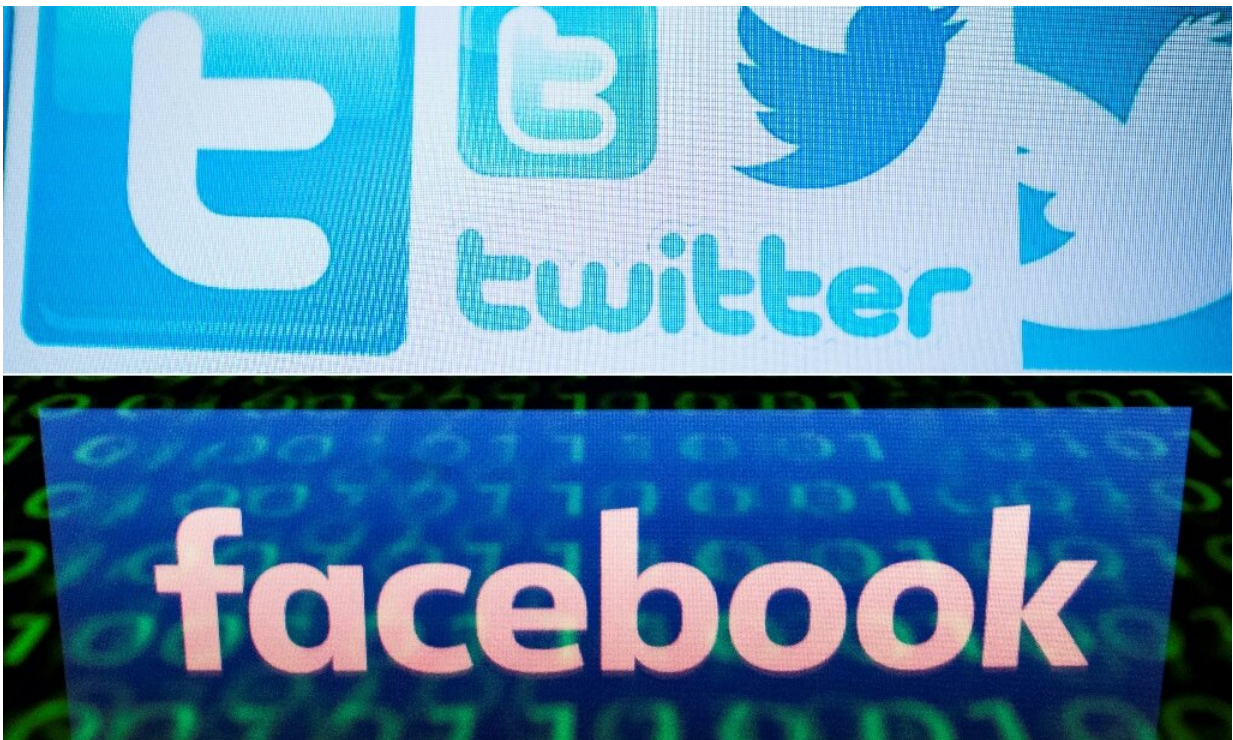


Australian government vows to unmask online trolls

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Australia's government said it will introduce legislation to unmask online trolls.

Australia's government said Sunday it will introduce legislation to unmask online trolls, and hold social media giants like Facebook and Twitter responsible for identifying them.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison, whose conservative coalition

government faces an election in the first half of 2022, said the law would protect Australians from online abuse and harassment.

"The [online world](#) should not be a wild west where bots and bigots and trolls and others can just anonymously go around and harm people and hurt people, harass them and bully them and sledge them," Morrison told reporters.

"That is not what can happen in the [real world](#), and there is no case for it to be able to be happening in the [digital world](#)."

Attorney General Michaelia Cash said the legislation, reportedly to be introduced to parliament by early 2022, was needed to clarify that the [social media platforms](#), and not the users, were responsible for defamatory comments by other people.

Confusion had been sown by a High Court ruling in September that found Australian media, as users managing their own pages on a social network, could be held liable for defamatory third-party comments posted on their pages, Cash said.

Under the planned Australian legislation, the social media companies themselves would be responsible for such defamatory content, not the users, she said.

It would also aim to stop people making defamatory comments without being identified, she said.

"You should not be able to use the cloak of online anonymity to spread your vile, defamatory comments," the attorney general said.

The legislation would demand that social media platforms have a nominated entity based in Australia, she said.

The platforms could defend themselves from being sued as the publisher of defamatory comment only if they complied with the new legislation's demands to have a complaints system in place that could provide the details of the person making the comment, if necessary, Cash said.

People would also be able to apply to the High Court for an "information disclosure order" demanding a social media service provide details "to unmask the troll", the [attorney general](#) said.

In some cases, she said, the "troll" may be asked to take down the comment, which could end the matter if the other side is satisfied.

Australia's opposition leader Anthony Albanese said he would support a safer online environment for everyone.

But he said the government had failed to propose action to stop the spread of misinformation on social media and accused some of the government's own members of spreading misinformation about Covid and vaccinations.

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