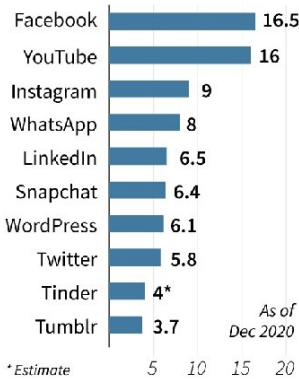


Australia and Facebook in talks over sweeping news ban

19 February 2021

Social media in Australia

Most popular platforms
Monthly visitors (million)



Main source of news (%)
University of Canberra report

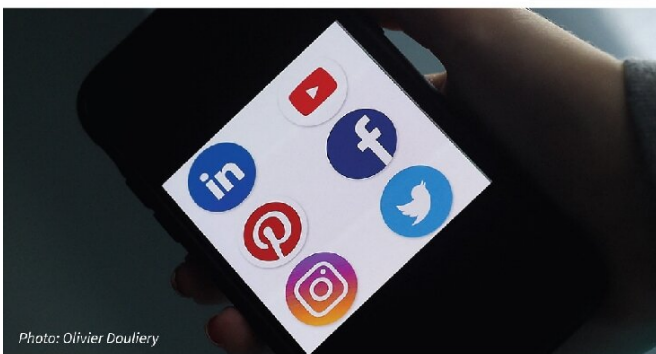
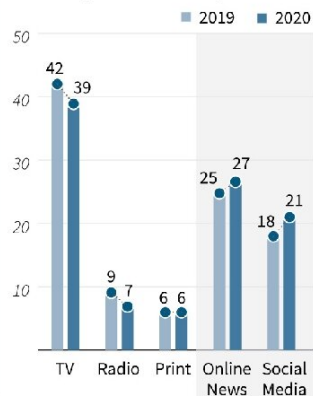


Photo: Olivier Douliery

Source: Civic Web Media/University of Canberra



Charts showing the most popular social media platforms in Australia and people's main news sources.

Australia and Facebook held high-stakes talks Friday after the social media giant sparked global outrage by blacking out news for its Australian users, as Canberra insisted it wouldn't back down on a new law that would force the tech firm to pay for journalistic content.

From Thursday, Facebook has blanked out the pages of media outlets for Australian users and blocked them from sharing any [news content](#), rather than submit to the proposed legislation.

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg said he had spoken with Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg on Friday to find a way out of the showdown, and that negotiations would continue over the weekend.

"We talked through their remaining issues and agreed our respective teams would work through them immediately," Frydenberg said.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison also urged Facebook to "move quickly past" what he called threatening behaviour and "come back to the table".

He said his government's world-first legislation to force Facebook and Google to pay Australian media for news content published on their platforms was garnering interest from leaders around the world.

"People are looking at what Australia is doing," he said, noting that he had already discussed the situation with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Canada's Justin Trudeau.

The government of the United States, Australia's close ally, declined to weigh in publicly.

"This is a business negotiation between multiple [private companies](#) and the Australian government," State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters.

"We do regularly engage in support of US companies but we don't generally share the specifics of that engagement," he said.



Facebook and Australia have traded barbs over a proposed law that would force the social media giant to pay for content

Traffic drops to Australian sites

The legislation, called the News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code, was approved this week by the lower house of parliament and will be debated beginning Monday by the Senate, which is expected to adopt the law by the end of the week.

Facebook has defended its dramatic response to the law, saying the legislation "fundamentally misunderstands" the platform's relationship with media organisations and that it had no choice but to bar news content from its services in Australia.

Since the ban came into effect, visits to Australian [news](#) sites by users at home and abroad dropped significantly, with overseas traffic down by over 20 percent per day, according to data analytics company Chartbeat.

The data also suggested users were not yet leaving Facebook in response to the ban, with no apparent rise in Google search traffic recorded.

News Corp Australia Executive Chairman Michael Miller, speaking to a separate Senate inquiry in Canberra, said the full impact of Facebook's decision was yet to be felt by publishers.

The move saw referral traffic from the platform disappear, he said, while "direct traffic to our websites was up in double digits".

Miller also encouraged the social media giant to return to direct negotiations with media outlets.

"The door is still open to Facebook."

Facebook's sweeping ban drew widespread criticism for inadvertently blocking access to several critical government pages, including emergency services, health departments and the national weather service—with most restored in the hours after it came into effect.

Despite earlier threats to pull its services from Australia over the legislation, Google softened its stance and instead brokered several deals with large [media](#) companies, including Rupert Murdoch's News Corp.

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