Inquiry into the Impact of Social Media on Elections and Electoral Administration Survey

Dr Subhajit Basu
Phone number: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
Email: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Organisation name:
Your position or role:

SURVEY

Q1. Encouraging social media platforms to take more action against inappropriate activities (such as bots, harassment, trolling, spreading fake news).

Response: Very good idea
A statutory 'duty of care' should be imposed on the social media platform to protect users and confront illegal activities.

Q2. The government funding media literacy campaigns to help people know what they can trust online.

Response: Good idea
A public education campaign would be hugely beneficial to increase awareness of the potential online harms.

Q3. Requiring public disclosure of all online political advertising (for example, webpages created by social media platforms showing all of the political advertising on their platform and who paid for it, or webpages created by parties/candidates showing all of the online ads they have run).

Response: Very good idea
The Electoral Commission in the UK has recently recommended a legislative amendment to necessitate imprints on online campaign material. In August 2020, the UK government unveiled new proposals that would require political parties and political campaigners to display a digital imprint to apply to all types of campaign content regardless of the country it is being promoted from, and across a variety of digital platforms.

Q4. Requiring online electoral advertising to state who paid for it.

Response: Very good idea
In Germany, under Article 7(9)(1) of the Rundfunkstaatsvertrag (RStV), paid political advertising is prohibited. In France, Article L. 52-1 of the Electoral Code prohibits, during the six months prior to an election, "the use, for the purpose of election propaganda, of any commercial advertising in the press or any means of audiovisual communication". This rule also includes online public communication. Under Art. L. 163-1 three months prior to elections, online platforms must provide users with information about who paid for the "promotion of content related to a debate of general interest".

Q5. Government support for independent and trust-worthy organisations that can fact-check claims or identify misinformation.

Response: Good idea
European Commission has introduced a self-regulatory code, and also guidance for member states about elections to the European Parliament. The self-regulatory Code of Practice on Disinformation, which

includes provisions that social media platforms need to follow to ensure transparency about political and issue-based advertising, also to enable users to understand why a given advertisement has targeted them.

Q6. Using independent organisations (e.g. the Victorian Electoral Commission) as a source of reliable information about electoral candidates.

Response: Very good idea

Q7. New laws requiring truth in political advertising.

Response: Very good idea
A bill banning microtargeting in political advertisements has been introduced in the US. Also in 2019, the UK Government published a report known as the Cairncross Review that determined, among other things, that 'investigative journalism and democracy reporting are the areas of journalism most worthy and most under threat [and] . . . that, given the evidence of a market failure in the supply of public-interest news, public intervention may be the only remedy'.

Q8. Are there other things you'd like to see the government do relating to social media or online advertising and elections?

Response: The UK government has introduced a campaign called "Don't Feed the Beast" designed to increase awareness for residents in the UK when reading and distributing online information.