

An Australian court ruling makes publishers legally responsible for every idiot Facebook user who leaves a comment | Nieman Journalism Lab

By Joshua Benton

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Is Australia the future?

I mean, from a time zone perspective, it definitely is. (Unless you're reading Nieman Lab in Kiribati, in which case: E rab'a te kaitiboo!) I keep meaning to ask the ghost of Dick Clark why Melbourne gets to do New Year's so early.

But Australia increasingly looks like the future for how the internet — particularly its supreme settler colonialists, Facebook and Google — gets governed.

Most prominently, it has managed to create what amounts to a tax on being a giant American tech company — only the tax gets paid to Rupert Murdoch rather than the Australian government. (Great job, everyone.)

And now a court ruling there promises to upend what has been a core principle of who gets blamed for bad behavior online — in ways that, if repeated, could have the effect of stifling public speech.

Here's the background. In 2016, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's long-running investigative TV show Four Corners aired an episode exposed abuses in the juvenile detention system in the Northern Territory. It opened with a shot of a teenaged boy shackled to a restraint chair, his head encased in a spit mask.

[...]

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