



September 16, 2021

Digital Citizen Initiative  
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To whom it may concern:

News Media Canada, which represents Canada's news publishers who employ 3000 journalists from coast to coast to coast, believes that free speech, journalistic freedom, and a strong, healthy, commercially viable, and fiercely independent media ecosystem are all vital to our democracy.

Canadians rely on their newspapers and news media to be their trusted sources of information, helping them make informed choices and holding people and institutions, including governments and corporations, accountable.

We welcome the opportunity to participate in this Consultation, and we appreciate the Government's commitment to taking meaningful action to combat hate speech and other kinds of harmful content online, while ensuring that freedom of expression and free debate are recognized, preserved, and protected.

We are among the country's leading defenders of freedom of speech. At the same time, as employers, we strive to provide a safe, healthy, and inclusive work environment for our journalists. As businesses who supply news and analysis, we also strive to protect our customers: the public who read our news and engage with us and their fellow readers. We listen to our customers. We take our responsibilities to them and the broader public seriously. We try to build a better common future for all. And we are accountable for both our actions and inaction.

As a business, the news publishing industry remains under threat from the unregulated and unchecked social media and other online communication service providers. At the same, our journalists—including female and BIPOC journalists—and our customers face online harm.

Across the globe, journalists face physical, judicial, and online harm. In addition to harassment from individuals, journalists face sophisticated defamation campaigns to discredit and silence them. These threats, and their potential impact on journalistic freedom of expression, have detrimental implications for society at large.

The findings of a survey conducted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the International Center for Journalists, about online violence against women journalists are alarming:

- 73% of women respondents said they had experienced online violence.
- 20% said they had been attacked or abused offline in incidents seeded online.
- 41% said they had been the targets of online attacks that appeared to be linked to orchestrated disinformation campaigns.

The impact on this violence on mental health is sobering:

- 38% missed work.
- 11% quit their jobs.
- 2% abandoned journalism altogether.

It also impacts journalistic practices and audience engagement:

- 30% self-censor on social media.
- 20% only 'broadcast' and avoid all interaction.
- More troubling, 10% avoid pursuing particular stories.

Like news publishers, online platforms curate content. They reap all the benefits of being a publisher, albeit on much more commercially favourable terms, yet they do not have the same responsibilities, and are not held accountable in the many ways that news publishers are in Canada. Indeed, they have allowed fake news and disinformation to proliferate around the globe.

Big Tech has a *societal obligation* to moderate these activities, just as any news publisher does. However, Section 230 of the *Communications Decency Act* exempts them from liability over hosting user-generated content and from liability when they choose to remove that content. Global companies operating in Canada are subject to Canadian law and should conduct themselves accordingly.

As advertisers know, these firms have enormous and extremely sophisticated technical prowess. Why then have they failed in their duty as content moderators and allowed harmful content targeted at journalists to be amplified on their platforms?

As a matter of principle, our journalists should be afforded the same protections in the online world as they are in the offline world. Accordingly, we recommend that the Government of

Canada explicitly recognize online threats to journalists directly into the Act. Journalists should be afforded "exceptional recourse" to online threats.

News Media Canada submits online platforms should:

- Act upon reports of harassment from news publishers and journalists within 24 hours.
- Invest in technology to detect online hate against journalists.
- Detail online harm against journalists in their transparency reports.
- Be held accountable through Canada's libel, defamation, and hate laws, just as Canada's news publishers are.
- Face economic penalties when they fail to comply with Canadian laws.
- Make it hard for internet trolls to 'profit' from the monetization of content that harms journalists.

This is not about limiting democratic expression; it is about protecting it and its most precious guardians: Journalists. And it is about ensuring *all* publishers, including internet intermediaries, are held accountable for harmful content by being transparent in their policies, expeditious and robust in applying those policies and in meeting obligations to customers, and compliant in meeting Canadian legal obligations.

Sincerely,



Paul Deegan  
President and Chief Executive Officer