

One rule for all, Online regulation and the impact on health promotion

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Background:

Social media age-gating, anti-porn online internet codes and a powerful Commissioner to all both in Australia has been on the agenda over a decade. Now these regulations are operational and are changing the way people in Australia use the internet. Scarlet Alliance looked locally and overseas to predict what the impact would be on sex workers. Working with similar community based organisations we have communicated the findings to our members, politicians, allies and general public.

Methods:

Health promotion frameworks rely on access to information and the ability for health programs to share knowledge with target populations. Scarlet Alliance examined the new online regulations to analyse what types of activities are covered by the new regulations, what the regulations are designed to capture, and the risks of overcapture. Health promotion was identified as at risk of overcapture. A network of allied organisations was developed. Advocacy meetings, form letters and a postcard campaign was undertaken.

Results:

Australia's online regulations create an opaque and unpredictable online landscape. Opinions have been as broad as "I will get a VPN, it won't affect me", right through to legal challenges undertaken by young people to fight for access to their social media accounts. The written regulations are black and white, but the actual impact is unclear, due to the immeasurability of what people don't know.

Conclusion:

Health promotion online is at ongoing risk of overregulation, resulting in shadow banning, censorship by algorithm and inaccessibility particularly to young people. The validity of various health messages are open for assessment by automated decision making and attempts by online platforms to comply with seemingly impossible regulations. Alongside our allies, sex worker advocates will need to monitor the situation with ongoing interest.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

"Scarlet Alliance, National Sex Workers Association receives funding from the Commonwealth, Victorian and Tasmanian Governments. Scarlet Alliance is able to exist in part due to membership fees paid by state and territory sex worker organisations and individual sex workers annually."