

APPENDIX 2

Apple News: Australian Code of Practice on Disinformation and Misinformation Initial Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Apple Pty Limited (**Apple Australia**) has ‘opted-in’ to a number of commitments in relation to Apple News.

BACKGROUND

Business and Content Context

The Australian Code of Practice on Disinformation and Misinformation is expressed to apply to services and products that deliver to end users in Australia user generated content and content returned and ranked by search engines in response to user queries. Content produced in good faith for entertainment and news content the subject of a published editorial code are expressly excluded.

Apple’s products and services in Australia do not fall within the expressed scope of the Code of Practice.

Notwithstanding the expressed scope and application of the Code of Practice, Apple Australia recognises the issues associated with disinformation and misinformation, and has ‘opted-in’ to the Code of Practice in relation to Apple News. This is in line with Apple’s commitment to “creating a trusted, informative news environment by advancing quality journalism and thwarting misinformation.” and in recognition of the many shared goals with other signatories in this area.

Approach to Disinformation and Misinformation

As Apple has previously said in its public statements,

Apple News believes that a free society depends on an informed public and that an informed public depends on a flourishing independent press. To serve these essential purposes in an increasingly complicated media landscape, Apple is committed to creating a trusted, informative news environment by advancing quality journalism and thwarting misinformation through Apple News.

Approach to monitoring performance

Apple monitors its performance relative to its commitments on an ongoing basis, and routinely considers improvements that can be made.

The Apple News team monitors Apple News through the in-app Report a Concern feature. We also engage directly with publishers, meet regularly with the third-party news-rating organisation NewsGuard (including working with NewsGuard’s team to identify potential new sources of mis- and disinformation), and attend events and trainings from organisations working in the tech-media space such as Ad Fontes, the Stanford Internet Observatory, and Harvard’s Shorenstein Center to understand new and emerging trends and best practice to prevent the spread of mis- and disinformation.

Data about trends

Members of the Apple News editorial team attend industry events and courses provided by organisations working in the tech-media space, and study the latest academic research about mis- and disinformation. Some of the organisations we have engaged with include the Stanford Internet Observatory, the University of Canberra’s News and Media Research Centre, Harvard’s Shorenstein Center, First Draft News, and the Tow Center for Digital Journalism, among many others. So far in 2021, some of the events our team has attended are the Systems for Understanding Methods of Media Analysis course from Ad Fontes and the Big, If True webinar from the Shorenstein Center. Editors continually evaluate practices with respect to the latest scholarship, share learnings across the Apple News organisation, and respond to emerging issues as they arise.

Future Initiatives

Apple believes that flexibility and adaptability is key to maintaining the integrity of Apple News, and thus is in constant exploration of what changes need to be made in order to respond to real-time challenges to Apple News.

OBJECTIVE 1: SAFEGUARDS AGAINST DISINFORMATION AND MISINFORMATION

OUTCOME 1A:

SIGNATORIES. CONTRIBUTE TO REDUCING THE RISK OF HARMS THAT MAY ARISE FROM THE PROPAGATION OF DISINFORMATION AND MISINFORMATION ON DIGITAL PLATFORMS BY ADOPTING A RANGE OF SCALABLE MEASURES.

Signatories will describe specific actions they have taken to meet this commitment, including any relevant quantitative or qualitative data (including case study examples) about the outcomes of these measures in the Australian context.

- Apple will conduct a pre-review of publishers who apply to distribute content on Apple News, and will screen for adherence to journalistic standards, taking into account the publisher’s likelihood of spreading misinformation or disinformation.
- Apple will prioritize a diverse set of standards-based news organisations, which will give preferential visibility to such organisations over those that are not standards-based.
- To prevent the widespread dissemination of misinformation or disinformation, Apple shall reserve its most visible real estate, News Top Stories, for human curation, focusing on choosing high quality content from a diverse set of trusted sources. Apple will not rely upon article popularity or user feedback to select stories for these high visibility spaces, which will help curb the spread of misinformation or disinformation.

- Apple will enable customers to provide feedback on a per article basis, including permitting customers to specify their complaint and will evaluate feedback in good faith to determine whether action is required.
- When important, lasting news events occur, Apple News will create a space for these events, which shall include credible and reliable news' reporting free of the influences of misinformation and disinformation.

In the past year, the Apple News team has done just that with its coverage of COVID-19. As an example, understanding that information and education are crucial to help prevent the spread of the deadly illness, Apple News created a special section that was highly visible for users, which contained important information about COVID-19 from news articles which had been vetted by the Apple News editors. It allowed customers to come to a trusted source to get reliable information rather than sifting through the internet to separate truth from fiction. Similar curated sections have been created and featured heavily in Australia during times of crisis such as the bushfires over 2019-20 and the recent flood emergency.

- In the United States and Australia, the Apple News editors also created a similar feature for the presidential and Congressional elections, which was key given the disinformation and misinformation campaigns being waged about the legitimacy of those elections.

OUTCOME 1B:

USERS WILL BE INFORMED ABOUT THE TYPES OF BEHAVIOURS AND TYPES OF CONTENT THAT WILL BE PROHIBITED AND/OR MANAGED BY SIGNATORIES UNDER THIS CODE.

Signatories will include links to published policies and procedures, guidelines and information relating to the prohibition and/or management of user behaviours that may propagate Disinformation and Misinformation via their Services or Products.

Apple News is opt-ing out of this Outcome.

Apple News is a service for professional news-gathering organizations and publishers, not for the dissemination of user-generated content. Unlike social media platforms, users of Apple News do not have the ability to share content to all News users, so this outcome and its focus does not apply.

Apple instead focuses on the quality of the content and its visibility, so as to prevent the propagation of Disinformation and Misinformation via Apple News.

OUTCOME 1C:

USERS CAN REPORT CONTENT TO SIGNATORIES THAT VIOLATES THEIR POLICIES UNDER 5.10 THROUGH PUBLICLY AVAILABLE AND ACCESSIBLE REPORTING TOOLS.

Signatories will include links to published policies, procedures guidelines that will enable users to report the types of behaviours and content that may propagate Disinformation and Misinformation via their platforms.

- Apple will enable customers to provide feedback on a per article basis (as set forth <https://support.apple.com/en-us/HT211226>), including permitting customers to specify the basis for their complaint and will evaluate feedback in good faith to determine whether action is required.

OUTCOME 1D:

USERS WILL BE ABLE TO ACCESS GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT SIGNATORIES RESPONSE TO REPORTS MADE UNDER 5.11

Signatories will give details about how and when they have published information about their responses to reports by users about content that violates their policies.

Although Apple News does not surface user generated content to its customers and thus will opt out of this objective, Apple will voluntarily, on an annual basis, report on the number of articles actioned in response to customer feedback.

In 2020, Apple News took action on more than 10,000 articles for a variety of reasons related to platform health including offensive or harmful images, discriminatory language, and the promotion of mis- or disinformation.

OBJECTIVE 2: DISRUPT ADVERTISING AND MONETISATION INCENTIVES FOR DISINFORMATION

OUTCOME 2:

ADVERTISING AND/OR MONETISATION INCENTIVES FOR DISINFORMATION ARE REDUCED.

Signatories will describe the policies, processes and products that they have developed and/or implemented in order to disrupt advertising and/or monetisation incentives for behaviours that may propagate Disinformation. This section should also contain any relevant qualitative or quantitative data (such as case study examples) about the extent those reduce advertising and/or monetisation incentives for Disinformation in relation to content that is provided to users in Australia.

- Apple will publish ad guidelines for Apple News publishers, such guidelines to include categories of advertisements not permitted to be made available in Apple News, including ads that are misleading or deceptive (<https://support.apple.com/guide/adguide/unacceptable-or-prohibited-content-guidelines-apd527d891a8/icloud>).

Apple News is designed to help publishers succeed in distributing quality content to Apple users. As part of that mission, we've designed an advertising system intended to maximize publishers' ability to leverage distribution on Apple News to help them generate advertising revenue while respecting user privacy and preserving the quality of content. A significant portion of the advertising seen by Australian users on Apple News is sold directly by publishers inside their own content and channels, not by Apple. Apple does not act as a sales intermediary in these transactions between publishers and advertisers and does not earn any revenue from them. The publishers keep 100% of the revenue they generate through their ad sales. Consequently, publishers on Apple News independently decide whether to monetize their content through advertising and, if so, what advertising they place within their content. Their advertising sales choices are subject to contractual restrictions against inappropriate content, including the requirement to comply with Ad Guidelines for Apple News Publishers (available at <https://support.apple.com/en-au/guide/adguide/apd2b2b7aef1/icloud>). These guidelines specifically restrict misleading or deceptive advertising. Apple News users can report a concern with content, including the advertising therein. That helps alert Apple to problematic advertising, which we can address with the publishers.

- Apple shall not, nor allow its resellers to, distribute certain prohibited types of advertisements, including defamatory, controversial, or offensive advertisements.

OBJECTIVE 3: WORK TO ENSURE THE INTEGRITY AND SECURITY OF SERVICES AND PRODUCTS DELIVERED BY DIGITAL PLATFORMS

OUTCOME 3:

THE RISK THAT INAUTHENTIC USER BEHAVIOURS UNDERMINE THE INTEGRITY AND SECURITY OF SERVICES AND PRODUCTS IS REDUCED.

Signatories will describe the policies and processes that they have implemented that prohibit or manage the types of user behaviours that may undermine the integrity and security of their services and products. This section should also contain any relevant qualitative or quantitative data (including case study examples) about the extent those measures have reduced the risk that inauthentic user behaviours undermine the integrity and security of their services and products delivered to Australian users.

Apple News will opt out of this Outcome.

We understand this Objective to be targeted at social media posts and users hiding behind fake profiles, or impersonating others, to post Disinformation or Misinformation to platforms. As Apple News does not provide users the ability to surface content News to other users within News (i.e., there is no functionality that allows a user to post an article within Apple News), this objective and its focus around inauthentic and other user behaviour leading to propagation of disinformation and misinformation does not apply to the Apple News product. User behaviour has a limited ability to affect the News experience of other readers - the design of Apple News is to adapt to the reading behaviour of an individual, not to allow a user to determine the visibility of content for other readers. This limits the effect any individual can have on Apple News.

OBJECTIVE 4: EMPOWER CONSUMERS TO MAKE BETTER INFORMED CHOICES OF DIGITAL CONTENT

OUTCOME 4:

USERS ARE ENABLED TO MAKE MORE INFORMED CHOICES ABOUT THE SOURCE OF NEWS AND FACTUAL CONTENT ACCESSED VIA DIGITAL PLATFORMS AND ARE BETTER EQUIPPED TO IDENTIFY MISINFORMATION.

Signatories detail measures implemented to enable users to make more informed choices about the source of news and factual content accessed via digital platforms. This section should also contain any relevant qualitative or quantitative data about Australian users response to measures such as the extent they have used empowerment tools (including case study examples) in relation to different categories of content (e.g., advertising, news, academic research, search engine results) provided on digital platforms.

- Apple News shall commit that content in Apple News shall include the publisher brand/logo on a per article basis to provide transparency to the user about the source of their news.

Apple News wants to empower users to develop their own digital literacy and establish their trusted resources for news. We believe that the first way to do that is to require that publishers clearly

identify themselves on their content to provide transparency to users about the source of content. Content on Apple News retains the brand logo and in many cases the unique design signatures of the publishers. Users can see that the articles on the app come from brands they trust, and they can just as easily choose to avoid content from brands they do not want to read. Users can also then apply critical thinking when viewing an article from an unfamiliar source.

- Apple shall work with third parties, such as NewsGuard, to perform evaluations of the trustworthiness of publishers on the platforms.

We work with the news rating organisation NewsGuard and perform our own editorial evaluations to develop an understanding of all the publishers on the platform and ensure that the most trustworthy sources are prioritised.

- Apple shall employ editors with newsroom experience in reputable Australian journalistic institutions to evaluate publishers on the platform, which will help ensure that reputable and trusted brands are surfaced to users, to help teach users about how to recognise credible sources of information.

The most visible part of the News app is Top Stories, which features only fact-based journalism and is 100% curated by veteran journalists from the Australian news industry who vet each story for adherence to standard journalistic ethics. As such, Apple is establishing the credibility of certain publishers and brands within its ecosystem and helping train users to recognise credible sources of information by establishing trust with the brands regularly featured in Apple News.

OBJECTIVE 5: IMPROVE PUBLIC AWARENESS OF THE SOURCE OF POLITICAL ADVERTISING CARRIED ON DIGITAL PLATFORMS

OUTCOME 5:

USERS ARE BETTER INFORMED ABOUT THE SOURCE OF POLITICAL ADVERTISING.

Signatories detail policies that provide users with information about the source of Political Advertising carried on digital platforms.

Apple is opting out of this outcome because it does not sell political advertising either directly or through its resellers.

However, Apple News shall contractually restrict publishers from selling harmful, defamatory, or controversial political advertising. As discussed in Apple's response under Objective 2, Apple News is designed to give publishers flexibility and choice in deciding what advertising they include inside their content, subject to contractual restrictions to protect users from inappropriate content and to respect user privacy. Accordingly, as a general matter, we do not prohibit publishers from including political advertising inside their channels and articles. Our Ad Guidelines for Apple News Publishers include prohibitions against, among other things, deceptive, discriminatory, defamatory and profane, and inappropriate content.

Apple will also provide transparency as to the information used to serve ads to customers.

Ads that appear in Apple News have an "Ad" mark so customers can identify the ads as paid placements. Customers can tap this mark to see the information used to serve the ad.

OBJECTIVE 6: STRENGTHEN PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF DISINFORMATION AND MISINFORMATION THROUGH SUPPORT OF STRATEGIC RESEARCH

OUTCOME 6:

SIGNATORIES SUPPORT THE EFFORTS OF INDEPENDENT RESEARCHERS TO IMPROVE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF DISINFORMATION AND MISINFORMATION.

Signatories detail measures to support for the efforts of independent researchers to improve the Australians public understanding of Disinformation and Misinformation both online and offline.

This section could for example set out how Signatories are cooperating with the research community including, for example, through funding of research through the provision of tools that facilitate the running of queries by researchers and fact-checkers and enabling independent monitoring and analysis of disinformation trends and assessment of the measures taken by platforms under this code. Signatories should also discuss issues (such as data protection concerns) that may have impacted on cooperation with the research community. This section should also contain any relevant qualitative or quantitative data (including case study examples) about the extent those measures have assisted research into the experience of Disinformation in Australia.

- Apple will explore opportunities to support independent researchers and other news organisations to help improve public understanding of disinformation and misinformation.

Apple is open to engaging with independent researchers conducting research in the areas of disinformation and misinformation. For instance, Apple has recently supported such organizations as the News Literacy Project, a nonprofit that provides resources for educators and the public to teach, learn, and share the abilities needed to be smart, active consumers of news and information; and Common Sense Media, a nonprofit that researches the impact of media and tech use on kids' physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development and provides entertainment and technology recommendations for families and schools. Apple also continues to partner with NewsGuard to expand its analysis of the trustworthiness of media sources, including an expansion into Australian news sources.

OBJECTIVE 7: SIGNATORIES WILL PUBLICISE THE MEASURES THEY TAKE TO COMBAT DISINFORMATION

OUTCOME 7:

THE PUBLIC CAN ACCESS INFORMATION ABOUT THE MEASURES SIGNATORIES HAVE TAKEN TO COMBAT DISINFORMATION AND MISINFORMATION.

Signatories list and/or provide links to reports made available to government and the public on relevant efforts under this Code.

Apple will publish its annual report.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This section should contain any further observations Signatories wish to make about their response to the Code,

Apple fully supports this initiative to address the problems of disinformation and misinformation. As a service that distributes professional publishers and eschews user generated content, our commitment to fostering a trustworthy, informative news environment is clearly visible in the Apple News app — through the selection of credible, reliable articles in Top Stories, the careful evaluation of every new applicant to the platform, and ongoing moderation efforts.