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## **AUSTRALIA'S MOVE TO TAME FACEBOOK AND GOOGLE IS JUST THE START OF A GLOBAL BATTLE**

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The Guardian (25 February 2021)

Michelle Meagher

Facebook and Google have become accustomed to an open world of information on which to build their closed ecosystems. Not any more. Australia is proceeding with a new media code that will force platforms to pay for news and bargain with news publishers. While Google has complied, Facebook called the regulators bluff by banning Australian news from its platform, before reaching a deal with the Australian government that allows it to avoid the new code, but only if it signs agreements with key publishers.

The new law is a bold move that shows that countries are realising they have more to gain by regulating the digital titans rather than bowing to their might. But it will be ineffective unless regulators around the world address the source of the problem: the dominance of Facebook and Google, and the concentration of power of the old media empires, which together undermine international, national and local journalism.

As a regulatory experiment, Australias new law was a success before it even came into force. Facebooks temporary news ban was poorly implemented. News was interpreted broadly, with the Australian weather agency, public health services, domestic violence charities and trade unions all blocked from the platform. These pages are now due to be reinstated, but the action has exposed Facebooks power as a news source and its willingness to degrade its product and deprive its users of vital news even during a pandemic.

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