

For Public Release



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Not Relevant

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The Hon. Dominic Leblanc
President of the Queen's Privy Council
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The Hon. Bardish Chaggar
Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth
By email: hon.bardish.chaggar@canada.ca

Dear Ministers:

On behalf of Twitter Inc., thank you for the opportunity to share some thoughts on information as it relates to your mandate letters.

Twitter is committed to improving the collective health, openness, and civility of the public conversation. We hold ourselves publicly accountable to that mission. Twitter's conversational health is built and measured by how we encourage civic debate, conversations and critical thinking.

Twitter urges the Government of Canada to pursue policies that reinforce freedom of thought, belief, opinion, speech, expression and association while increasing diverse perspectives.

Research: Misinformation, Disinformation and Fake News in Canada

For the purpose of this letter, the term misinformation also includes disinformation, propaganda and "fake news".

There is no consensus on a definition of misinformation in Canada. Sean Simpson, vice-president of public affairs for the research firm *Ipsos* stated in 2018: "The funny thing about fake news is we can't even agree on what's fake".¹

A 2019 survey conducted by the market research firm *Ipsos* on behalf of the *Centre for International Governance Innovation* found two-thirds (65%) surveyed mentioned having seen fake news on social media.² Interestingly, according to that same poll, nearly half (45%) surveyed also reported having come across fake news via mainstream media sources.

That single *Ipsos* poll is cited by many organizations such as *MediaSmarts*³ and

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*News Media in Canada*⁴ as the definitive source on misinformation in Canada.

Recommendation 1:

Twitter is supportive of conducting more research into misinformation in Canada.

Twitter is supportive of conducting more research into misinformation in Canada. However, we see a lot of commercially-driven and non-peer reviewed research that makes sweeping assessments of online behaviours using only a very limited data set.

For example, the popular (although deeply flawed) website *Bot Sentinel* gives the Leader of the Official Opposition Andrew Scheer's verified Twitter account a 4% chance of being a bot.

We are also seeing funding grants for research given from only a single benefactor or organization, or a single government grant or agency.

Twitter recommends peer review as an essential part of the research process. We also recommend the research moves beyond polling data and news organizations into academic research teams. In particular, we look to academic researchers to help inform the ways in which human behaviours and biases drive both the consumption and distribution of misinformation. We also support research into understanding the commercial motivations of the producers of misinformation and the extent to which misinformation is spread by editorial coverage of the misinformation itself.

Recommendation 2:

All research be peer reviewed and data sets should be made public.

Recommendation 3:

Support for academic research into information integrity should be a priority.

Twitter acknowledges we have a role to play. We are committed to providing academic researchers unparalleled access to our public conversational data.⁵ Canadian researchers have been using our application program interface (API) to conduct real time research. For example, University of Guelph researchers using our API have discovered Twitter can help to detect the spread of infectious animal disease outbreaks, sometimes even earlier than conventional tracking methods.⁶

If Canadian researchers are having trouble accessing our API, the relevant teams at Twitter are happy to review their use cases.

State-Backed Information Operations

Combatting attempts to interfere in conversations remains a top priority for

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Twitter. Our goal is to remove bad faith actors and to advance public understanding of these critical topics.

Twitter defines state-backed information operations as coordinated platform manipulation efforts that can be attributed with a high degree of confidence to state-affiliated actors. State-backed information operations are typically associated with misleading, deceptive, and spammy behavior. These behaviors differentiate coordinated manipulative behavior from legitimate speech on behalf of individuals and political parties.

Much of the information relating to state-backed information operations is held by Governments and is classified/top secret. We encourage the Government of Canada to support industry and academics by declassifying important information where possible. As demonstrated by our unique archive, Twitter strongly recommends building a broader public coalition of knowledge regarding state-backed information operations research.

Recommendation 4

The Government of Canada update policies on how and when to de-classify and share information where possible.

Recommendation 5

The Government of Canada use its power to convene to support industry and academics by building a broader public coalition of knowledge regarding state-backed information operations research.

In October 2018, Twitter published the first comprehensive archive of Tweets and media associated with suspected state-backed information operations on Twitter, and since then, we have provided seven additional updates covering a range of state-backed actors.⁷ To date, it is the only public archive of its kind, now spanning operations across 15 countries, and includes more than nine terabytes of media and 200 million Tweets.⁸ Using our archive, thousands of researchers, including some employed by the Government of Canada, have conducted their own investigations. In other countries many organizations share their insights and independent analyses with the world.

By making this data open and accessible, we empower researchers, journalists, governments, and members of the public to deepen their understanding of critical issues impacting the integrity of public conversations online. We encourage other organizations to improve the access to data and transparency of their work on state-backed information operations.

Elections

Twitter notes that reports indicate Canada's 43rd election was mostly free of misinformation and free of foreign influence.⁹ We value our collaboration with the

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Government of Canada and other stakeholders to ensure a secure election.¹⁰

However we must all remain vigilant. Twitter is the home of many conversations, and politics is one of most important conversations on platform. The hashtags #cdnpoli/#polcan consistently trends in the top three conversations in Canada.

It's always an election year/month on Twitter. In the last two years, voters have taken part in the global Twitter conversation about elections in the Canada, European Union, Australia, India, and Indonesia. In Canada we are looking forward to the upcoming election in Saskatchewan.

Twitter believes that all political advertisements should be clearly distinguishable from editorial content, including news, whatever their form and whatever the medium used.

Recommendation 6:

Political advertisements on all platforms should be clearly distinguishable.

Twitter also believes Elections Canada should play a larger role in information integrity. We recommend Elections Canada be tasked with creating and issuing a public database that includes unique identifying numbers for political parties, electoral district associations and registered third parties in order to help voters authenticate information from a source other than the advertisement or advertiser.

Recommendation 7:

That Elections Canada be tasked with creating a public, searchable database that includes unique identifying numbers and information banks for all organizations participating in elections.

In the United States the Federal Election Commission (FEC) issues organizations, such as political parties, political action committees and candidates, a unique number. The FEC publishes that unique number on a public database that is searchable and contains other information such as contact information, websites, social media links, etc. The FEC identifier provides an additional layer of certainty to voters that a political organization is who they say they are. The FEC identifier also makes it easier for voters to find more information about the organization, and improves the overall integrity of the information available online.

Building Consensus and Developing Guiding Principles

We are continuously working to improve the collective health of the public conversation. Twitter's open and real-time nature is a powerful antidote to the spreading of all types of false information. Journalists, experts and engaged citizens constantly Tweet side-by-side correcting and challenging public

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discourse.

For example, Twitter actively works to maintain strong relationships with Canadian law enforcement agencies. We have positive working relationships with the Canadian Centre for Cybersecurity, the RCMP, government organizations and provincial and local police forces.

On January 29th, 2020 in partnership with the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) we launched a new, dedicated search prompt to ensure that when Canadians come to the service for information about COVID-19, they are met with credible, bilingual, authoritative information from PHAC first.

Canada was one of the first 10 countries to partner with Twitter to launch this prompt. In each country where we have launched the prompt we have partnered with the local public health agency and/or World Health Organization to provide credible and authoritative information on the coronavirus. The prompt is currently available in 74 countries in 28 languages.

The Public Health Agency of Canada is listed, with their agreement, as one of Twitter's safety partners in our Safety Center. The link is [here](#).

Recommendation 8:

Twitter supports the approach of the Canada Declaration of Electoral Integrity Online.

Twitter supports the approach of the Canada Declaration of Electoral Integrity Online with a few tweaks. For example, the work with civil society, educational institutions and/or other institutions to support efforts aimed at improving critical thinking, digital literacy and cybersecurity practices to promote digital resilience across society was late in coming and focused only on a few organizations during Election 43.

We would be happy to review this type of approach with you in detail.

Recommendation 9:

The Canada School of Public Service be tasked with improving the digital literacy skills within the federal government.

We also think that building technical and digital knowledge should be a goal for the civil service. We recommend regular digital literacy courses be delivered by the Canada School of Public Service. Technology and digital literacy courses can be delivered annually as a part of compliance training. Civil servants should also be given increased access to new technologies and digital platforms at their desk tops.

Strengthening Citizen Resilience

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Information sharing and collaboration are critical to Twitter's success. We are constantly working to continue to expand our academic and non-government organization (NGO) partnerships to ensure they're globally diverse and able to advance public understanding of these issues.

Twitter recommends supporting investments in digital and media literacy. We also recommend supporting discussions and training with regard to provincial curriculums on digital literacy.

Recommendation 10:

The Government of Canada articulates and supports clear digital literacy goals, including for people who belong to groups that are currently underrepresented (for example, older Canadians); and that the Government map clear, innovative pathways through the education, not-for-profit and private sectors.

Twitter supports groups that educate users, and especially youth, about healthy digital citizenship, online safety, and digital skills. Some of our Canadian partners include MediaSmarts, Get Cyber Safe, KidsHelpPhone, We Matter and Jack.org.

We look forward to continuing to work with the Government of Canada on these issues.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about these recommendations.

Sincerely,



Michele Austin
Head Government | Public Policy (Canada)
Twitter Inc.

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Endnotes

¹ <https://globalnews.ca/news/4428483/canadians-fake-news-poll/>

² <https://perma.cc/X5BX-PL76>

³ <https://mediasmarts.ca/press-centre/press-releases/those-tiny-hippos-your-house-they%E2%80%99re-back-teach-us-about-%E2%80%99fake-news%E2%80%99>

⁴ <https://nmc-mic.ca/spot-fake-news-online/>

⁵ <https://mobilsyrup.com/2020/01/06/twitter-support-page-academic-researchers/>

⁶ <https://news.uoguelph.ca/2020/03/twitter-can-be-used-to-track-spread-of-infectious-diseases-u-of-g-researchers-discover/>

⁷ Gadde, V. and Roth, Y. (17 October 2018). Enabling further research of information operations on Twitter.

https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2018/enabling-further-research-of-information-operations-on-twitter.html

⁸ Twitter (June 2019). Transparency Report.

<https://transparency.twitter.com/en/information-operations.html>.

⁹ <https://www.cp24.com/news/election-has-been-mostly-free-of-mis-and-disinformation-research-shows-1.4632225>

¹⁰ <https://www.rcinet.ca/en/2019/10/23/no-foreign-interference-detected-in-canadas-federal-election-officials-say/>