

TRUST DEFICIT: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON TECH PLATFORMS AND NEWS PUBLISHERS

Relevant for: Science & Technology | Topic: IT, Internet and Communications

The [decision of India's competition watchdog to order investigations into Google](#), following allegations by the country's digital news publishers that it has broken antitrust laws, marks a significant moment in a country where the fortunes of the news media industry have been on a downward path. The development is not a total surprise. For, governments in many countries such as Australia and France have used their political capital in recent years to try and correct the enormous imbalance that exists between big technology companies that control news in the digital sphere today and the traditional journalism industry that keeps the wheels of news running, thereby also creating the basis for the conversations that are so important in a democracy. The investigations have been ordered on the basis of a complaint by India's Digital News Publishers Association, which has alleged that Google not only dominates the market for information but also [abuses this dominance](#). It does so, the association has alleged, by not providing a fair share of the advertising monies and by not providing adequate information. It has also complained that it does not get paid for the news snippets that appear in search. The association's broader point is that the terms of engagement are "unilaterally and arbitrarily" dictated by the tech platform, and there is nothing its members can do about it. The imbalance of power and the denial of a fair share of revenue will be questions that the watchdog will be interested in exploring.

What was recognised by lawmakers in Australia, for instance, when [they last year came up with a law](#) that sought to level the playing field between big tech platforms and news publishers, is a condition that is true around the world. In India too, the power imbalance exists and has only gotten worse in recent years. The news media industry, which invests in journalists, has struggled to stay afloat while the big tech platforms have become more and more powerful. But the Australian case is one of a rare intervention by a government in publisher-platform relationships. The current investigations in India is more a case of the publishers finding an appropriate existing forum in search of relief. The sustainability of journalism in the digital era has far-reaching implications, especially in a democracy. It has been quite evident in recent years that the industry has ended up sacrificing quality in its quest for more eyeballs, and nuance in the quest for more emotional engagement. The cost of not being able to get a fair value for journalistic effort can never be overemphasised enough.

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