

Australian political advertising and disinformation on Chinese-language media services

Four recommendations for improving trust and security in digital campaigns for Australian elections



A submission to the *Inquiry into the 2025 federal election* for the Australian Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters

by the RECapture research group

Dr Fan Yang

Dr Robbie Fordyce

Dr Luke Heemsbergen

Sima Mohammadi

Stevie Zhang

Dan Dai

Acknowledgement of Country

This research was conducted on the lands of the peoples of the Kulin Nations, Wurundjeri Country, Wurundjeri Woi-Wurung Country, Wadawurrung Country, Bunurong Country, and Eastern Maar Country.

In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

Authors

Fan Yang (University of Melbourne), Robbie Fordyce (Monash), Luke Heemsbergen (Deakin), Sima Mohammadi (Deakin), Stevie Zhang (University of Melbourne), Dan Dai (Queensland University of Technology).

Researcher biographies and funding disclosures are noted at the end of this submission.

Suggested citation

Fan Yang, Robbie Fordyce, Luke Heemsbergen, Sima Mohammadi, Stevie Zhang, Dan Dai, *REcapture Submission to the Inquiry into the 2025 Federal Election (Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters)* (Online Document, 2025) REcapture. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17149624>

GenAI disclosure

This submission is based on our original research. The authors did not use artificial intelligence tools in any form for data capture and analysis, submission preparation, or other aspects of this report.

We caution that, as the report is written in English and contains Chinese characters and romanised Chinese, large language models trained primarily on English data may generate inaccurate summaries and thus misrepresent the Submission.

Copyright by the authors 2025

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License ([CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited.

Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary of Recommendations	3
2. Submission Context & Research Summary	4
2.1 Regarding political advertising	4
2.2 Regarding political disinformation	5
3. Justifications of Recommendations	6
3.1 Recommendation regarding machine-readable authorisations.....	6
3.2 Recommendation regarding supply chain transparency	8
3.3 Recommendation regarding use of non-major platforms in disinformation disruption	10
3.4 Recommendation regarding the role of generative artificial intelligence (genAI)	12
4. Research and Evidence	14
4.1 Research Overview	14
4.2 Research Methods.....	15
4.3 Platform selection	16
4.4 Measuring and categorising political disinformation	18
4.5 Identifying political advertisements.....	19
4.6 Research findings	20
5. Future directions.....	23
6. About RECapture.....	24

1. Executive Summary of Recommendations

Our research findings uncover the challenges in electoral regulation and enforcement, particularly concerning political advertising and disinformation that may undermine Australia's electoral integrity. We therefore propose the following regulatory and practical reforms to address these complex issues, with detailed explanations of our recommendations in section 3.

Recommendation 1:

Electoral communications, including paid ads, printed materials, or messages from a disclosure entity should include a machine-readable attribution layer for enhanced effectiveness for authorising electoral communications.

Recommendation 2:

Political candidates and their offices should be subject to greater transparency in the workflows of political advertising with particular attention to the 'supply chains' of political communication.

Recommendation 3:

Apply ground-up monitoring of non-major platforms to debunk highly mobile narratives that cross platforms to gain audiences and quickly influence the way electors vote.

Recommendation 4:

AI use in campaign materials should be disclosed and monitored, while industry and civic consultation over clear rules to protect integrity and trust in elections continue.

These recommendations are based on the nature of political advertising across platforms, the unreliability of platform 'ad libraries,' and the ambiguous nature of supply chains in political candidates' engagement with the attention economy online. While political parties are exempt from the *Privacy Act 1988* (Section 7C), their advertising partners are not, and there is clear public interest in disclosing where ads are proliferating and why. There are already similar industry solutions to these data-privacy issues in place, with such functions as 'why am I seeing this' available to social media users, and machine readable licensing. With regard to machine readability, not only is this best practice to trace, evaluate and monitor ads, it ensures that human viewers also know an ad is a political ad. For instance, on WeChat, political advertisements embedded within commercial media outlets often appear as image banners equivalent in size to article headlines. However, their clarity and resolution are frequently unsuitable to clear attribution text. We therefore call for enhancing clarity in the definition and regulation of political advertising in the digital environment and increasing transparency across the full supply chain. Disinformation crosses platforms, adapting narratives to suit specific audiences. Ground-up monitoring of non-major platforms—often overlooked in favour of major US platforms—offers an effective means of intervention before such narratives spread more widely among siloed media communities unaware of fact-checking elsewhere. Generative AI uses in political advertising continue to

evolve and we suggest a cautious approach to both regulating speech and actions towards election integrity.

2. Submission Context & Research Summary

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry into the 2025 federal election and related matters. Our submission is based on research evidence comprising a dataset of 1083 posts focusing on political disinformation and political advertising, collected from three Chinese-language social media platforms: WeChat, RedNote (xiaohongshu), and YouTube's Chinese-language channels covering the 2025 Australian federal election, campaigns, and related policy discussions.

Following our research findings on political disinformation and advertising on Chinese-language social media services, this submission specifically addresses the following terms of reference and provides corresponding recommendations:

- *the suitability of the current authorisation framework and requirements, having regard to the evolution of communication methods and technology.*
- *reforms to address the ongoing threats of interference in our electoral system, both foreign and domestic.*
- *potential reform of safety and security arrangements, including consideration of the powers, processes, and capacity of the AEC to manage and address increasingly threatening or disruptive behaviour.*

Along with other terms including

- *the implementation and operation of the electoral reform passed by the 47th Parliament, particularly regarding the use of money or capital in the most recent election.*

Between October 2024 and May 2025, RECapture collected a total of 1,083 items that were identified as political disinformation and advertisements on WeChat, RedNote (or known as *Xiaohongshu*), and YouTube, targeting Chinese Australian communities. Specifically, on WeChat, we identified 104 media reports containing misleading or inaccurate information about elections, campaigns, or policies. On RedNote, we found 103 disinformation posts and 26 pages registered under political candidates' names for campaigning. On YouTube, we collected 14 Chinese-language videos discussing the 2025 federal election, eight of which contained misleading content.

Particularly, **WeChat** and **RedNote** emerged as the primary platforms where disinformation and political advertisements produced and circulated largely beyond the oversight of public institutions or regulatory safeguards. By comparison, relatively few political disinformation posts were observed on YouTube.

2.1 Regarding political advertising

- Among the collected political ads on WeChat, 94% of them were authorised with 6% of them unauthorised or incompletely authorised.

- RedNote has emerged as a new battleground for political campaigning. Among 26 social media profiles associated with political candidates, 65% (17) were either unauthorised or only partially authorised, while 35% (9) were fully authorised.
- A wide range of platforms and channels have been used for political campaigns, including short video services, influencers, and podcasts, to engage with voters and to circumvent certain platform restrictions. This diversity in online political communication strategies exposed regulatory ambiguities regarding the definition of political advertising and the narrow scope of enforcement regarding authorisation requirements for third-party promotional activities.
- The expansive online political advertising meant that candidates may lack oversight of their campaigns' management and dissemination across multiple platforms and borders, exposing gaps in accountability and the shifting of responsibility to outsourced processes.

2.2 Regarding political disinformation

- Commercial Chinese-language media outlets in Australia and education and immigration business entities based in China and Australia were the main drivers of political disinformation. On RedNote, 62% of the collected disinformation posts were published in China and 31% were published in Australia.
- Immigration was a central theme in disinformation campaigns, including topics such as visa policy changes, humanitarian immigration programmes, and pathways to Australian citizenship.
- We found no evidence of state-coordinated disinformation campaigns aimed at favouring any political party or candidate. Public WeChat accounts managed by the Chinese Embassy in Australia or Chinese state media did not cover the 2025 Australian federal election, nor did they make any references to specific candidates identified for campaigning purposes. Despite that, narratives of foreign interference were once again being weaponised to undermine migrant voters, particularly affecting the political participation and representation of Chinese-Australian communities.
- Disinformation related specifically to the election process—such as disinformation about election dates or voting procedures—made up approximately 5% of posts respectively on WeChat and RedNote. The remaining 95% of disinformation posts, focusing on broader political, social, and policy matters, have the potential to sway voter opinions, shape political decision-making, and undermine the integrity of Australian democracy. This highlights the limitations of the AEC's current capacity for monitoring and reporting electoral disinformation.
- Disinformation is an ongoing challenge, transcending platforms and languages. Our research traced narratives, such as immigration-related content—starting from the translated materials on Chinese-language social media that were later reappropriated and circulated on YouTube and Facebook. The multilingual and cross-platform circulation of disinformation underscores the limitations of platform-specific fact-checking mechanisms and their inability to mitigate ongoing threats to Australia's democratic system.

Further details of the findings, including case studies and statistical analyses, are presented in the subsequent findings section, which follow our recommendations.

3. Justifications of Recommendations

3.1 Recommendation regarding machine-readable authorisations

Electoral communications, including paid ads, printed materials, or messages from a disclosure entity should include a machine-readable attribution layer to enhance authorisation effectiveness.

Overview

We recommend the implementation of machine-readable authorisations (per Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 section 321D) in election campaigns. If adopted, digital election campaign materials would be required to include any authorisation in a ‘machine-readable layer’ to support transparency, accountability, and enforcement of attributions, and would provide improved assurance and integrity for election campaigns.

The expansiveness of digital political campaigning and the personalised targeting of political advertising highlights the gaps in the current authorisation framework and regulatory requirements. There is a non-negligible effort related to tracing and enforcing appropriate authorisations, and remediating this with computationally readable elements would empower the agency above and beyond the current system’s limitations. These limits could be addressed with a machine-readable symbol and/or in code.

Machine-readability

A ‘machine-readable layer’ is a visible tag and/or embedded metadata in a digital object that can be trivially read by a computer and can be used to identify attributes of the object. These are commonly used in situations such as to record camera settings in images or geolocate data in social media posts. In the current media ecosystem are generally retained by files as they are downloaded, copied, sent, and/or uploaded to different systems.

Machine readable layers are commonly embedded in our digital ecosystem to enforce copyright and copyleft systems, for instance in image, video, audio and text files, as well as having implementations for HTML pages. The use of machine readability is a complex security feature in the context of digital rights management (DRM) for content controls,¹ but in the case of copyleft systems these features are readily embedded as a means of tracing attributions.² Creative Commons in particular³ has enabled search services (such as Google) and photo sharing services (such as Flickr) to enable legal and appropriate use of content by allowing users to sort and filter content based on license categories. Major content management services such as Github use similar machine layers to enable users to easily understand the origins and responsibilities present in different repositories on the platform.⁴ Because this model is low-

¹ Greg Lastowka, [Virtual justice: The New Laws of Online Worlds](#). (2010) Yale University Press.

² Lawrence Lessig, *Code (Version 2.0)* (2006) Basic Books.

³ Creative Commons, [About CC Licenses](#). (Online Document, n.d.).

⁴ GitHub Docs, [Licensing a repository](#). (Online Document, n.d.).

3.2 Recommendation regarding supply chain transparency

Political candidates and their offices should be subject to greater transparency in the workflows of political advertising with particular attention to the ‘supply chains’ of political communication.

Overview

We recommend the creation of increased transparency requirements for election campaigners in order to monitor the supply chains of political communication. This recommendation is based on the current challenges related to doubts related to the origins of campaign materials, and possibilities related to targeting concerns, including hyper-targeting of vulnerable individuals.

In commercial media environments, disinformation and political advertising often reinforce each other. Some outlets use misleading headlines and fabricating details to drive clicks, then direct audiences to political advertisements, sharing engagement metrics with campaign teams or third-party managers to sustain partnerships built on generating this very ‘click bait.’ The commercial media environment feeds disinformation and favours political advertising. Political candidates and their offices should be subject to greater transparency and oversight in political advertising workflows, with particular attention to the ‘supply chain’ of political communication.

Transparency and visibility

For the public, this means ensuring visibility into how campaigns are designed and delivered. Here, we see the applicable value of Ethics and Probity in Procurement⁶ which requires all public sector purchasing processes to be conducted with ethics and integrity, free from corruption and bias, ensuring equal treatment of all tenders and application of transparent, consistent, and accountable performance evaluation mechanism. Candidates should be obliged to disclose information about the purchasing of media packaging services, the rationale for selecting third-party campaign managers, and media/influencer credibility checks, and the systems in place for campaign monitoring and performance evaluation. This recommendation is to prevent political campaigning from deepening disinformation ecosystems that regulators have limited visibility into, or capacity to address. This would also allow campaigns to identify bad actors in the industry, who are contracted to certain works, but might subcontract, or not fulfill their obligations.

This recommendation, and the justification below, are based on the EU’s new Regulation on Political Advertising (RPA),⁷ which consolidates national transparency requirements by mandating more information to be disclosed to citizens, the public, authorised regulators and relevant private actors. The RPA also reinforces the GDPR’s ban on using sensitive data for targeted political advertising. While the RPA represents an important step towards harmonising democracy, transparency obligations alone are insufficient without robust mechanisms for monitoring, enforcement, and compliance assurance. With the RPA, it also seems that much of the regulatory burden is borne by community-minded citizens, journalists, and researchers. However, we think that greater accountability should rest with political

⁶ Australian Government Department of Finance, [Ethics and Probity in Procurement](#) (Online Document, 09 September 2025).

⁷ Max van Drunen, Eva Groen-Reijman, Tom Dobber, Arman Noroozian, Paddy Leerssen, Natali Helberger, Claes de Vreese, and Fabio Votta ‘[Transparency and \(no\) more in the Political Advertising Regulation](#)’ *Internet Policy Review* (Opinion, 25 January 2022).

candidates, their campaign teams, and advertising agencies, who should carry the primary and secondary responsibility for ensuring the integrity and transparency of their electoral activities.

Complications in regulating truth

While we recognise and deeply value the role of truth in political advertising laws,⁸ we suggest a broader compliance framework grounded in the principle of ‘truth and honesty’ in political advertising working alongside the request of transparency proposed above. The operation and enforcement of such a framework would necessitate a combination of candidate self-regulation, institutional oversight and intervention, and public monitoring—at this state, there are very few restrictions on political advertising under the implied freedom of political communication in Australia.⁹ To this end, we propose enabling the existing ‘Election Promise Tracker’¹⁰ on an ongoing and expanded scale. This would oblige elected officials to update information on their annual performance and progress towards fulfilling campaign promises, consolidated on a publicly accessible and curated platform for review by both citizens, journalists, researchers, and institutions.

The definition of disinformation remains contested globally. Prevailing regulatory approaches are oriented towards the binary of truth versus falsehood, matters of intent, or evidence or motivation of harm. Each has proven ambiguous or insufficient for effective governance through monitoring and enforcement. The problem is that harms are often defined by privileged bystanders rather than by those who are directly subjected to them. The intention behind disinformation may take time to reveal or hold some ambiguity, while disinformation itself operates in the grey areas between truth and falsehood. Legislation of this kind is largely *ex post*, meaning interventions occur only after harm has already been caused. This approach is ineffective to uphold the integrity of elections and promote democratic values. What is required are *ex ante* measures, preventative mechanisms that address disinformation before it causes damages. We suggest a ‘Critical Disinformation’¹¹ perspective that situates disinformation within its historical, social, cultural, and political contexts. This approach foregrounds how systems of social distinction—such as race, gender, class, and species—shape the production, circulation, and reception of disinformation, and how institutional power sustains these dynamics. In this sense, disinformation is rooted in *information injustice* against already vulnerable groups and this needs to be recognised by Australian institutions and publics. To address this, we recommend a co-design mechanism for digital literacy education resources including textbooks and creative content, developed collaboratively by public institutions, fact-checkers, academics, and community members.¹² Engagement formats should be diversified to reflect audience preferences, thereby ensuring communication is not only fit-for-purpose but also fit-for-audience.

From a Critical Disinformation perspective, monitoring and intervention efforts need to be broadened beyond major platforms to consider how international media outlets, marginalised digital platforms, and

⁸ Yee-Fui Ng, [Truth in political advertising laws: design, operation, effectiveness, and recommendations for reform](#). (Online Report, December 2024).

⁹ Anika Stobart and Kate Griffiths ‘[Few restrictions, no spending limit, and almost no oversight: Welcome to political advertising in Australia](#)’ (Online Report, 14 April 2022) *The Conversation*.

¹⁰ School of Media and Communication RMIT University, [Election Promise Tracker](#).

¹¹ Rachel Kuo and Alice Marwick, ‘[Critical disinformation studies: History, power, and politics](#),’ (2021) 2(4) *Harvard Kennedy School of Misinformation Review*.

¹² Fan Yang, Luke Heemsbergen, Robbie Fordyce ‘Contextualizing disinformation during the 2023 Voice referendum on WeChat: Manipulating knowledge gaps and whitewashing Indigenous rights’ (2025 in print) *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review* 6(5).

public institutions impact elections. This expanded approach is grounded on the current limitations of existing fact-checking practices, which have often relied on partnerships between journalists, fact-checkers, digital platforms, and universities. While we recognise the value of these partnerships, they have also constrained the scope of fact-checking and debunking onto major American digital platforms. Recent funding withdrawals by technology companies, together with their increasingly anti-DEI and anti-ESG, and anti-‘woke’ stances under the Trump administration further diminish prospects for addressing disinformation that disproportionately harms structurally disadvantaged communities here in Australia.¹³ We therefore recommend a collaborative model involving researchers, community members, and journalists to address the disinformation challenges faced by vulnerable groups. Government resources and support should be directed towards enabling and sustaining this new collaborative infrastructure.

3.3 Recommendation regarding use of non-major platforms in disinformation disruption

Apply ground-up monitoring of non-major platforms to debunk highly mobile narratives that cross platforms to gain audiences and quickly influence the way electors vote.

Overview

We recommend that the AEC apply ground-up approaches to assess variations of disinformation narratives on non-major platforms. As specific disinformation narratives cross from one platform to another, they can gain cultural and emotional relevance that increases their reach and impact. These narratives have significant potential to influence voter behaviour while evading conventional regulator enforcement mechanisms based in English-language media, as well as fact-checkers’ oversight that have historically focused on major digital platforms run from America.

We note that disinformation narratives grow and transform as they shift from one digital platform to the next, gathering audiences as they transfer back and forth between major and non-major platforms. However, our recommendation is not necessarily to regulate flows of misinformation and disinformation in non-major platforms, as doing so would risk undermining freedom of speech, but to learn from them so that regulators, political parties, and civil society can more quickly design and deploy ‘debunking’ narratives at opportune times and in conjunction with vulnerable communities’ needs. While highlighting emerging disinformation carries some risks, our research indicates that key narratives are often longitudinal—resurfacing repeatedly ahead of elections, referendums, and health or natural crises—and consistently reach their intended audiences. Preparing citizens through proactive debunking provides policymakers with enhanced tools and foresight compared to current debunking approaches.

Informational complications of communications siloing

Currently, disinformation research and intervention remain siloed within major platforms, neglecting harms caused on non-major platforms. RECapture’s longitudinal research has noted that disinformation or misinformation operates across and between English- and non-English-language media ecologies. For

¹³ Rest Tech Australia ‘[Misinformation and disinformation will not be combatted with industry codes](#)’ (Online News, 11 September 2024).

instance, on WeChat and RedNote, disinformation narratives that originated from national tabloids like Daily Mail or SkyNews, were translated on minor social media platforms by Chinese-language media outlets in Australia, and were then circulated onto major American platforms through political commentators and influencers. These narratives were later amplified back into both English and non-English Australian public discussion, perpetuating a self-reinforcing, cross-platform cycle of disinformation circulation that is challenging to disrupt. As our research focuses solely on public posts for online users' privacy, we reasonably assume that disinformation shared in group or individual chats could have an equal, if not greater, impact. To stop these network effects of disinformation, we recommend a model of 'sentinel surveillance' of non-major social media platforms used in Australia in order to inform and debunk new trends and narratives of disinformation.

This is not due to higher disinformation on non-major platforms, but our research has observed that major disinformation narratives often take varied forms on non-major platforms. For example, during the 2023 Voice referendum, while the AEC and *The Guardian* debunked primary narratives, variations persisted and circulated on WeChat, reframing general English-language narratives into culturally and emotionally relevant terms for Chinese Australian audiences.¹⁴ We therefore suggest that now and ahead of the next round of election it is important to start documenting and categorising variations of disinformation narratives and their circulation patterns to refine and advance the rigor and efficacy of future debunking interventions.

Media credibility check and sentiment-flagging system

Specifically, Australia should invest in research and development (R&D) of an expansive and inclusive media bias check and credibility-flagging system, deployable as plugins across both major and non-major digital platforms. Existing media bias tools, such as Media Bias / Fact Check¹⁵, AllSides Media Bias Chart,¹⁶ and Media Bias Detector,¹⁷ primarily focus on US outlets and, occasionally, major Australian publishers. Their methodologies are often contested, with divergent interpretations on 'truth' and 'objectivity' across the political spectrum. R&D efforts should involve collaboration between universities and national journalism organisations to develop a media bias evaluation platform tailored to the Australian context, providing the public with reliable mechanisms to identify and verify legitimate news sources.

In our research, we identified that headlines and articles often embed sentiments of fear and anxiety to capture readers' attention. As a result, misleading information is shared not necessarily out of trust, but through the circulation of shared sentiment. We therefore propose the development of a 'sentiment-flagging system' that detects and notifies users of the general sentiment in a public post, enabling readers to better assess whether the content remains credible in light of the emotions it employs. A precedent for the proposed 'sentiment-flagging system' exists in the 2021 initiative by the Centre for Internet and Society and Tattle Civic Technologies.¹⁸ Their pilot Uli, is a free browser plugin that automatically hides offensive content on Twitter / X, providing a safer experience for women in India. We propose that a similar system should also be developed in Australia to assess news sentiment,

¹⁴ Fan Yang, Luke Heemsbergen, Robbie Fordyce 'Contextualizing disinformation during the 2023 Voice referendum on WeChat: Manipulating knowledge gaps and whitewashing Indigenous rights' (2025 in print) *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review* 6(5).

¹⁵ [Media Bias / Fact Check](#) (Online Website, n.d.)

¹⁶ [AllSides Media Bias Chart](#) (Online Website, n.d.)

¹⁷ [Media Bias Detector](#) (Online Website, n.d.)

¹⁸ Tattle, '[Qualitative Research: Uli](#)' (Online Document, 15 February 2023).

perform bias evaluation, and deliver real-time notifications or indicators based on the content's trustworthiness score.

While consultation or collaboration with platforms is welcomed when possible, caution is needed due to business imperatives and differing interpretations of public interests and harms across regulators, researchers, platforms, and citizens. RECapture's ongoing research has identified content that researchers classify as outright disinformation—information that is demonstrably false—yet often falls outside the regulatory scope of platforms such as RedNote and WeChat. Further, WeChat's recent punitive measures against content creators primarily restrict further circulation via sharing its URLs, rather than raising awareness of what the harm is associated and why the post is deemed non-credible by the platform's algorithm.

3.4 Recommendation regarding the role of generative artificial intelligence (genAI)

AI use in campaign materials should be disclosed and monitored, with ongoing industry and civic consultation to establish clear rules that protect electoral integrity and public trust .

Overview

The AEC should continue to conduct global and domestic mapping research to document AI uses beyond the identified cases in the AI & Elections report,¹⁹ and categorise instances of harms inflicted by AI technologies during elections. At this stage, the instances of AI uses are limited and harms are understated. The AEC should define a list of Designated AI Uses for disclosure in electoral communications, meaning AI use should be disclosed alongside authorisation statements. We propose that such Designated AI Uses include: synthetic electors, generated or deepfaked images or audio included in campaigns materials, and data capture from members of the public for campaign targeting, personalisation of messaging, or other uses. We also encourage regulators to consider whether any of these approaches can be feasibly restricted or banned due to their potential harms. Recognising that campaigns may find practical benefits from AI use that align with existing practices or may not be substantially disruptive or unfair, we expect Designated AI Uses would include carve outs for campaign planning, ideation for specific campaign materials, basic image or text processing functions (including refinements, spelling and grammar review).

Uncertain AI regulatory environment

Australia currently faces an uncertain regulatory environment for AI, as reflected in the Productivity Commission's interim report on Harnessing Data and Digital Technology²⁰ signalling weakened privacy protections and reduced copyright relevance, effectively enabling American tech companies to consolidate their presence in the country. The current Voluntary AI Safety Standard²¹ provides only

¹⁹ Australian Electoral Commission, [AI & Elections](#) (Online Document, 16 September 2025).

²⁰ Australian Government Commission Productivity Commission, [Harnessing Data and Digital Technology](#) (Online Report, 5 August 2025).

²¹ Australian Government Department of Industry, Science and Resources, [Voluntary AI Safety Standard](#) (Online Document, 5 September 2024).

guidance, leaving organisations to self-govern AI use with little compliance enforcement. Given Australia's uncertain regulatory environment and tech-neutral stance, AI presents the next major threat to electoral integrity—a risk that has been concerned by the AEC in the 2025 federal election.

In AEC's recent publication on AI & Election, the general approach relies on authorisation while allowing the use of AI in controversial contexts like Robocalls, deepfakes, and chatbots as long as authorisation is provided. This approach is limited, overlooks the broader harms AI has inflicted in current elections outside Australia and in future elections. Authorisation alone is insufficient, as discussed in our recommendations and justifications above.

AI has multiple areas of potential impact on election campaigns, with some AI use being unavoidable in some contexts due to now being embedded natively in some platforms and services. This does not negate the fact that alongside many benefits, AI use - and generative AI in particular - has the potential for negative effects on information accuracy and attributability around most aspects of elections and election campaigns. At a minimum, understanding how AI is being used by campaigners will be important for determining best practices in the future, and some remediation of excessive use would benefit the development of codes and expectations.

Synthetic electors

A specific issue with AI in election contexts that we believe has significant potential for harm is the capacity to create what we call 'synthetic electors.' A synthetic elector is an AI-created representation of an eligible voter that may be used to misrepresent levels of support or disagreement with a particular party, policy matter, individual politician, or category of politicians. This could be possible to do via agents or chatbots; including the manufacture of images, video, and audio content; or other methods that are in development, and may have an adverse affect on public expectations of support.

These synthetic electors differ from conventional bots in that they can be deeply personalised and persuasive, built using social media sentiment data to target individual voters.²² They are harder to discern as non-authentic electors as AI's agentic capacities and generative content evolve; and are poised to be widely distributed as barriers to relevant technologies continue to drop. Considering these trends in relation to the cut-outs for political parties from The Privacy Act creates an acute risk of elector manipulation.

Relevant policy addressing synthetic electors will need to consider shifts in online economies from attention to relational influence. The current regulatory challenges are posed by swarms of agentic AI actors—with minimal human oversight—generating electoral content to specific human targets, and the authenticity of any political sentiment encountered.

Of particular note is the way that synthetic electors potentially disrupt the well-established connection between actual popular support and citizens' genuine willingness to contribute to campaigns through social media engagement, phone banking, and other digital campaigns strategies. Synthetic electors will create a mismatch between real support and material support, and raise issues with influence campaigns that may not strictly involve disinformation. Instead, synthetic electors may affect perceptions of community or individual political alignment beyond what exist in reality and therefore mislead citizens' votes.

²² Bruce Schneier and Nathan Sanders, '[The apocalypse that wasn't: AI was everywhere in 2024's elections, but deepfakes and misinformation were only part of the picture.](#)' *The Conversation* (Online News, 3 December 2024).

Attribution of Generative Content without Consent

Considering the challenges of generative and agentic AI and democratic integrity, we offer one aspirational recommendation for the limited scope of Australia's next federal election. We propose a specific consideration around generative AI (genAI) in the next election around political content when the writs are issued. First, the AEC should clearly state that AEC's authorisation-attribution is not compatible with electoral materials that create synthetic content of parties, Australians, or other persons without their consent. By so doing, such content is prima facie likely to mislead an elector with regard to ensuring voters know the source of certain communications, while are also likely to influence how electors vote in a federal election.

While we acknowledge the AEC has no mandate to regulate 'truth' or processes of creating advertisements, we suggest that electoral communication materials that produce synthetic content of politicians, other public figures, or electors without consent are inherently misleading to voters in terms of attribution source; the source of what they see or hear does not exist.

Rather than a regulation around 'truth' this aspirational recommendation focuses on a key moment of media trust, and maintains AEC's focus on signalling who is making electoral communications. Regulating the question "Is this a synthetic depiction of a real person?" is a more narrow, verifiable, and enforceable action than considering "is this statement true?". Many platforms have similar policies against undisclosed synthetic impersonation and our recommendation would give AEC a new way to consider its statutory measures during the upcoming election period, but not broaden AEC mandate in terms of political communication rights.

We acknowledge that issues around scope (who is an identifiable real person?), and satire (is it clearly not meant to mislead?), among other issues persist around this recommendation. Yet, considering the issues at play in the rapidly evolving technology space, this aspiration provides a first step in addressing a world of AI-generated content in a key moment of electoral integrity.

This initial action for the AEC in the upcoming election cycle relieves regulators from deciding on valences of truth in advertising, and bias or uneven regulation to communications Gen-AI products. Just saying 'no' to non-consensual generative AI content in the writs period is a tactful response to the potential tsunami of Gen-AI electoral material around the corner; material that can be microtargeted to an extent it becomes impossible to track, trace, and control.

Moreover, legal, cultural, and industry norms are rapidly evolving in this space, with unknown public and civic consequences. While consultation with parties and the public is key, caution in the proximate electoral period is a wise buffer to ensure integrity in the processes of Australian elections. Further, having the AEC set the cultural precedent now, while these practices are still malleable, will shape party and affiliated campaign trajectories into the future.

To attenuate that aspirational recommendation to market conditions, we would consider operationalisation of AI 'guardrails' in electoral matters that consult on the introduction of types of explicit and conspicuous labelling, consider industry feedback, and a sunset clause to any restrictions as AI-generated content integrates with social norms in future elections.

4. Research and Evidence

4.1 Research Overview

Our RECapture project is a multi-year social research lab that provides critical research insights and advice to Australian government, journalists, and NGO bodies. The project commenced in 2019, and engaged in the systematic collection and analysis of news articles regarding Australian politics on Wechat, expanding to include RedNote (also known as Little Red Book or ‘*Xiao Hong Shu*’) in 2025. So far the team has analysed 21197 articles published on WeChat, a further 696 videos published on RedNote, and 17 on YouTube. The research team has been sought by journalists for timely and ongoing analyses of the 2019, 2022, and 2025 Australian Federal elections, the 2023 Australian Indigenous Voice referendum, and the NSW by-election in 2022. Notably our research data on the 2022 election captured Josh Frydenberg’s early election campaign, which started informally prior to the announcement of the election.

This research has informed the work of national and international media such as the Guardian, BBC, TIME Magazine, ABC, SBS, The Age, The Australian, and 9News, Australian public institutions including the AEC, Department of Home Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Electoral Commissions in Queensland and Victoria, fact-checking bodies, and grassroots Chinese migrant communities. Our analysis is supported by one of the largest ethnic news media datasets in the world, analysing political commentary in Australia established and maintained by the RECapture team. RECapture has made a multi-year contribution to public understanding of political information flows across social media platforms in Australia.

Between 2024 and 2025, RECapture contributed centrally to the *Monitoring Political Disinformation and Advertising on Chinese-Language Social Media Services* project, with the lab establishing a direct channel through an open curated dataset to support the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) and its Defending Democracy Unit (DDU), fact-checking bodies (AAP Fact Check and ABC Verify) and journalists at the ABC in their up-to-date monitoring, reporting, and intervention efforts concerning political disinformation and unauthorised political advertisements on WeChat, RedNote (*Xiaohongshu*), and YouTube. These platforms mirror many of the information profiles of other media platforms, and provide direct insights into our Chinese-language media ecologies as well as helping to inform perspectives on other similar services.

4.2 Research Methods

Between November 2024 and May 2025, the research monitoring process was conducted by a team of four bilingual Chinese-English researchers with professional backgrounds in journalism, media and communication, and fact-checking. The team adopted the ‘share-capture’²³ method, developed by the RECapture team in 2021 and used continuously since then. The share-capture method combines manual data collection and coding with automated content scraping.²⁴ It has proven effective for collecting data from enclosed, non-transparent digital media ecosystems—such as WeChat and other Chinese-language

²³Robbie Fordyce. ‘[Yet Another Computational HASS Tool for the Mobile Investigation of Platforms](#)’ [Computer software, 2023].’ *Zenodo*.

²⁴Robbie Fordyce. [WeChat and the Australian Federal Election](#) (Research Blog, 29 October 2024).

social media platforms—where external automated data scraping is blocked and open API access is unavailable.

During the monitoring period, public posts related to the 2025 Australian federal election were collected from WeChat, RedNote, and YouTube. URLs of relevant posts were exported from the target platforms to an intermediary Telegram group chat shared between a scraping bot and the researchers. User engagement metrics—including the number of likes, shares, and comments—were manually recorded. Researchers coded the exported public posts according to identified themes and topics, and determined whether each post belonged to a disinformation category, providing justifications for their coding decisions. For quality control and coherence in the coding process, two researchers were assigned to each platform and therefore each researcher monitored two platforms. Each researcher spent at least an hour on each platform everyday for platform monitoring, data collection, coding, and preliminary analysis. Each pair was responsible for cross-checking codes and exported content to ensure coding accuracy and comprehensiveness of data collection. Meetings were held every week to discuss emerging themes and tactics of political advertising and election-related problematic information.

RECapture generated 360 codes from WeChat, 277 codes from RedNote, and 49 codes from YouTube’s Chinese channels. Each code represents a topic or theme discussed in the collected disinformation narrative.

The researchers acknowledge that the data collection was not intended to capture all misleading public posts or political advertisements on the three selected platforms in the lead-up to the 2025 federal election. Some posts may have been removed by the author or censored by the platform before they could be collected, and content removed prior to collection was beyond the researchers’ capacity to capture. The reasons behind content removal fall outside the scope of this research. For posts that were removed after data collection, the initial codes, researchers’ justifications, and self-notes are considered sufficient to provide context for these removed posts. In a subsequent stage of the analysis, the team will apply technical methods to recover posts that have been removed.

4.3 Platform selection

Platform selection was informed by the team’s prior work²⁵ and research on Chinese Australians,²⁶ which identified these three platforms as among the most widely used by Chinese Australian communities for news and political discussion. This section outlines the operation of each platform in Australia and their roles within Chinese Australian communities.

WeChat

is the dominant information platform for global Chinese-speaking users, often referred to as China’s answer to Facebook. It integrates messaging, short videos, e-commerce, digital payment, and news feeds. The content production environment on WeChat is primarily shaped by commercial imperatives while simultaneously governed by China’s internet regulatory framework, irrespective of the jurisdiction in which the platform is accessed or used.

²⁵ Fan Yang and Sukhmani Khorana, [Inquiry into civics education, engagement and participation in Australia](#) (Parliamentary Submission, 30 August 2024).

²⁶ Jennifer Hsu, [2023 Being Chinese in Australia: Public opinion in Chinese communities](#) (Online Report, 2023).

Since August 2012, WeChat has been used by Chinese migrants to build and maintain their own digital media ecosystem. Leveraging the platform's publishing/blogging feature—Official Accounts—Chinese diasporic content producers compile, translate, and reproduce news stories from Australian national media outlets into Chinese for their target audience. These audiences primarily include Chinese-speaking communities in Australia and China, and Australian businesses (mainly those targeting the Chinese-speaking markets) and, at times, Australian political parties and politicians.

Political advertising, campaigning, and promotion are formally prohibited on WeChat.²⁷ To navigate this restriction, political parties and figures outside China often collaborate with Chinese-language media accounts operated by overseas Chinese communities to amplify their presence and disseminate their policies.²⁸

Since 2020, the emergence of WeChat's short-video feature 'Channel' has tended to disrupt the dominance of content production on Official Accounts. However, due to the higher production costs associated with video content compared to text-based translation, the majority of Chinese-language digital media outlets have not widely adopted this feature. Exceptions included influential and profitable outlets that are able to produce video content on WeChat Channel or RedNote (below), often with assistance of AI-generated voiceovers and subtitles.

The business interest-driven nature of content production under the platform economy—rather than by public interest—has created an environment where news is blended with emotions and problematic information (including misinformation and disinformation, which exhibit varying degrees of falsehood and harm). This mixed content aims to attract users' clicks, which are subsequently converted into advertising revenue.

RedNote

RedNote, also known as the Little Red Book (*Xiaohongshu* in Chinese), is an emerging platform known for its visual communication and integration of social media and e-commerce functions.²⁹ It operates similarly to Instagram and has gained popularity among younger Chinese-speaking users.

Due to RedNote's focus on entertainment and e-commerce, the platform's algorithms do not promote political discussions or the visibility of political figures. The algorithms actively suppress political content. For example, users cannot find political figures' profiles using the search function.

One way to navigate RedNote's restrictions on political content is to embed political commentaries into lifestyle videos / vlogs. Australian politicians engage with Chinese influencers, businesses, and digital media outlets on RedNote, thereby blurring the boundary between entertainment and political discussion.³⁰ This strategy enables the promotion of political campaigns without authorisation, creating a lack of transparency concerning Australian democratic processes.

²⁷ WeChat, '[Terms of service](#),' (Online Post, 20 February 2024).

²⁸ Fan Yang, Robbie Fordyce, Luke Heemsbergen, '[Toward a translational news ecology: Covering the 2022 Australian Federal Election on WeChat](#),' (2024) 18(26) *International Journal of Communication* 4883-4908.

²⁹ Jianqing Chen, '[What's happening on RedNote? A media scholar explains the app TikTok users are fleeing to - and the cultural moment unfolding there](#),' (Online News, 20 January 2025) *The Conversation*.

³⁰ Fan Yang, Dan Dai, Luke Heemsbergen, Stevie Zhang, '[How do candidates skirt Chinese social media bans on political content? They use influencers](#)' (Online News, 1 May 2025) *The Conversation*.

YouTube

Chinese-language Channels on YouTube are widely used for accessing long-form video content, including political commentary and news, particularly among diaspora communities. Chinese channels on YouTube operate free from Chinese internet regulations. YouTube’s diverse visual functionalities allow content producers to engage audiences through videos, short videos, and livestreaming content.

4.4 Measuring and categorising political disinformation

In identifying and measuring political disinformation, we applied the evaluation metrics established by AAP Fact Check (Table 1), as suggested by the project funder. These metrics were used as a framework for assessing problematic information and the extent to which the content was misleading.

Categorisation	Project status
True – The claim is accurate.	Exclude
Mostly True – The claim is largely accurate but includes minor errors or problems.	Exclude
Mixture – The claim includes accurate information but also significant errors or problems.	Include
Mostly False – The claim is mostly inaccurate but includes minor elements of truth.	Include
False – The claim is inaccurate.	Include
Misleading – The claim is accurate in parts but information has also been presented incorrectly, out of context or omitted.	Include
Unproven – There is not enough evidence to determine the claim’s accuracy.	Include

Table 1. AAP Fact Check criteria when categorizing potential misinformation. Source can be accessed via the link <https://www.aap.com.au/factcheck/how-we-work/>.

During data collection, the team’s identification of problematic information drew on established expertise in media and communication, journalism, fact-checking, and political communication. We acknowledge that our media literacy enables our timely identification of problematic information. Posts identified as disinformation frequently distorted information to varying degrees when compared against sources from public institutions and credible national and international media outlets, such as the ABC, the Guardian, Crikey, The Saturday Paper, The Australian, the Age, Sydney Morning Herald etc. In applying the prescribed evaluation metrics, we observed significant limitations, including overlapping categories and the inherent challenges that disinformation often operates within grey zones that blend elements of truth and falsehood.

4.5 Identifying political advertisements

We follow Sally Young’s definition of political advertising which includes three main contexts:

- Government advertising, or the advertisements that governments use to promote or explain government policies and programmes
- Lobby group and private interest advertising, or the advertisements that unions, business leaders, ‘issue’ groups and so on use to sway public opinion and politicians, and
- Election advertising, or the advertisements that candidates and parties utilise during an election campaign to persuade voters to vote for them.³¹

It also includes negative campaigning, or attacks directed at opponents. In our data collection and analysis, we placed an emphasis on the identification and authorisation of political advertisements.

The methodology for data collection and analysis is detailed at the conclusion of this submission.

Overview of the datasets

Categories	WeChat	RedNote	YouTube	Total
Political disinformation	104	103	14	1,083
Political advertising / social media profiles	836	26	Not included in the subscribed Chinese-language accounts	

Table 2. *Political disinformation and political advertisements (including social media profiles managed by political candidates) on WeChat, RedNote, and YouTube.*

³¹ Sally Young, cited in ‘[Parliament of Australia Department of Parliamentary Services.](#)’ Political advertising in Australia (Report, 29 November 2024).

During the data collection period, we identified 1,083 instances of political disinformation and political advertisements (including social media profiles operated under the names of political candidates) across the three platforms.

On WeChat, we collected 104 media reports containing misleading or inaccurate information related to the election, campaigns, or policies. On average, disinformation posts on WeChat received more than 6,000 views and more than 170 rounds of shares. We also collected 836 political ads. On average, political ads receive 2623 views.

On RedNote, we collected 103 public posts containing misleading content. On average, misleading posts received 80 likes. We also identified 26 social media profiles operated by political candidates including 17 non-authorised or incompletely authorised pages run by political candidates and their teams and nine authorised profiles. On average, social media profiles run by candidates maintain 1969 followers.

On YouTube, we identified 14 Chinese-language videos discussing the 2025 Australian federal election, including eight videos that contained deceptive information and the rest contained misleading opinions.

Compared to WeChat and RedNote—where electoral misinformation generally falls outside the scope of platform governance and where content not concerning Beijing’s political interests is typically left unregulated—YouTube has more clearly articulated policies on misinformation, particularly regarding elections. However, YouTube’s approach to regulating non-English-language content remains opaque. We assume that the combination of YouTube’s governance structures and the higher production costs associated with long-form video content, compared to short video formats, contributed to the lower volume of problematic content observed on the platform.

4.6 Research findings

The key findings that inform our recommendation and position have been developed over a series of peer reviewed academic articles, and have been further documented in journalistic accounts of our research. We present these here for the Committee to review for specific findings, and welcome inquiry regarding our research.

Materials marked with an asterisk [*] refer to materials directly relevant to the 2025 Australian election cycle.

Peer-reviewed research papers

Yang, Fan, Heemsbergen, Luke, & Fordyce, Robbie. ‘Contextualizing disinformation during the 2023 Voice referendum on WeChat: Manipulating knowledge gaps and whitewashing Indigenous rights’ (Accepted for publication) *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review*.

Yang, Fan, Fordyce, Robbie, and Heemsbergen, Luke. ‘WeChat and the 2023 Australian Indigenous Voice Referendum: Key actors, public opinions, misinformation and disinformation.’ [2024] *SocArXiv Papers*. <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/76uqf>.

Yang, Fan, Fordyce, Robbie, and Heemsbergen, Luke. ‘Toward a translational news ecology: Covering the 2022 Australian Federal Election on WeChat.’ [2024] 18 *International Journal of Communication*. 4883-4908. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/22818/4828>.

Hristova, T., Cinque, T., Heemsbergen, L., Jones, A., Yang, F., & Fordyce, R. (2024). Industries Of Infrastructural Futures, Automated Cultures, And Algorithmic Dynamics. *AoIR Selected Papers of Internet Research*. <https://doi.org/10.5210/spir.v2024i0.14100>.

Yang, Fan, and Martin, Fran. The 2019 Australian federal election on WeChat Official Accounts: Right-wing dominance and disinformation. [2021] 5 *Melbourne Asia Review*. <https://melbourneasiareview.edu.au/the-2019-australian-federal-election-on-wechat-official-accounts-right-wing-dominance-and-disinformation/>.

Direct public engagement

[*] Yang, Fan, Dai, Dan, Heemsbergen, Luke, and Zhang, Stevie. 'How do candidates skirt Chinese social media bans on political content? They use influencers.' *The Conversation* (Online News, 1 May 2025) <https://doi.org/10.64628/AA.fmvk67dd3>.

[*] Yang, Fan, Heemsbergen, Luke, and Fordyce, Robbie. 'This election, disinformation is swirling on Chinese social media. Here's how it spreads.' *The Conversation* (Online News, 16 April 2025) <https://doi.org/10.64628/AA.vhsqhahhq>

Yang, Fan. 'No' campaign is dominating the Voice debate among Chinese Australians on WeChat: New research. *The Conversation* (Online News, 7 October 2023) <https://doi.org/10.64628/AA.mcqd6d7vh>

Yang, Fan, 'Is WeChat's threat to Australian elections overstated?' *East Asia Forum* (Online Research Blog, 1 April 2023) <https://eastasiaforum.org/2023/04/01/is-wechats-threat-to-australian-elections-overstated/>

Yang, Fan, 'WeChat's wires are crossed in Australian politics.' *East Asia Forum* (Online Research Blog, 17 November 2022) <https://eastasiaforum.org/2022/11/17/wechats-wires-are-crossed-in-australian-politics/>.

Yang, Fan, and Fordyce, Robbie 'The WeChat model: How Facebook's ban could change the business of news.' *The Conversation* (Online News, 19 February 2021) <https://doi.org/10.64628/AA.wmprgsau3>.

Selected media reporting of RECapture research

[*] McManagan, Jim, 'No, Australian government is not reviewing Chinese permanent visas' *AAP FactCheck* (Online News, 01 May 2025) <https://www.aap.com.au/factcheck/no-australian-government-is-not-reviewing-chinese-permanent-visas/>.

[*] Campbell, Charlie, 'Chinese Australians, Previously Scorned, Are Now Courted as Nation Nears Tight Election' *TIME Magazine* (Online News, 29 April 2025) <https://time.com/7281177/australia-election-chinese-community-courted-campaigns-labor-albanese-liberal-dutton/>.

[*] Ng, Kelly, 'Why Australia's opposition is vying for votes on Chinese social media,' *BBC News* (Online News, 2 May 2025) <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cqx4vr5nqr8o>.

[*] ABC News, 'Research finds unauthorised election campaign ads on Chinese apps.' *ABC News* (Live TV interview, 2 May 2025) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zjkSqmnLI0>.

[*] Willan, Fiona, 'Election battle on Chinese apps intensifies as Liberals target crucial voters.' *ABC News* (Investigative report & televised interview, 27 April 2025) <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-04-27/chinese-social-media-apps-political-campaigns-federal-election/105201336>.

[*] Kuang, Wing, 'Misinformation and disinformation appears rife on non-English social media.' *SBS* (Podcast, 13 April 2025) <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/podcast-episode/misinformation-and-disinformation-appears-rife-on-non-english-social-media/1r63ww48a>.

[*] Belot, Henry, and Kuang, Wing. 'RedNote used to spread false claims about 'wicked' policy on Chinese Australians and citizenship.' *The Guardian* (Online News, 03 April 2025) <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/apr/03/rednote-used-to-spread-false-claims-about-wicked-policy-on-chinese-australians-and-citizenship>.

[*] Ison, Sarah, 'Chinese app slaps Aussie politicians with restrictions.' *The Australian* (Online News, 26 February 2025) <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/politics/chinese-app-slaps-aussie-politicians-with-restrictions/news-story/0b42fe5647697189942bbdc833f5170d>

5. Future directions

RECapture's submission has responded to the inquiry of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, drawing on research evidence and analysis from the project *Monitoring Political Disinformation and Advertisements on Chinese-Language Social Media Services during the 2025 Australian Federal Election*.

The complexity of online political advertising across media ecosystems challenges the AEC's regulation and enforcement. For Chinese Australian communities, WeChat and RedNote have become key sites for political disinformation and advertising. While most WeChat ads during the 2025 Australian federal election were authorised, unauthorised ads were prevalent in prior state and local elections. RedNote, a visually oriented platform, hosts diverse and often unauthorised candidate campaigns. To bypass platform restrictions, candidates engaged content creators, businesses, media outlets, and influencers. Compared to Meta and X where regulatory focuses, intervention, and public monitoring are centred, candidates exploit regulatory gaps on marginalised platforms, like WeChat and RedNote, enabling campaigns with minimal accountability and oversight.

The absence of effective safeguards against online disinformation in Australia has disproportionately exposed systemically disadvantaged groups, including Chinese Australian communities with limited English proficiency to electoral injustices and related harms. This raises concerns regarding the integrity of their political decision-making, the validity of their votes, and whether their experiences and voices are equitably represented in policy compared to non-minority Australians.

Given the growing complexity of the digital environment, we recommend greater transparency in electoral communication materials and authorisation, the workflows of political communication, cross-platform disinformation narratives, and the use of AI in electoral materials. We have noted that transparency alone risks weak enforcement. We therefore call for strengthening AEC monitoring and enforcement powers, supported by Australia's research and development capacity in addition to regulatory reforms.

6. About RECapture

RECapture is led by Dr Fan Yang, Dr Robbie Fordyce, and Dr Luke Heemsbergen. Between 2024 and 2025, the project received research assistance from Dan Dai, Stevie Zhang, and Mengjie Cai. Additionally the lab with later in-kind data and analytical contributions from Melbourne Data Analytics Platform (MDAP) led by Dr Kim Doyle and Dr Emily Fitzgerald based at the University of Melbourne. Each member of the research team obtains knowledge and professional expertise in media, journalism, policy, fact-checking, and political communication.

Aspects of this submission were supported by funding from the Susan McKinnon Charitable Foundation Ltd for the study of Political Disinformation and Advertising on Chinese-Language Social Media Services during the 2025 Australian Federal Election (November 2024–May 2025).

Investigator biographies and disclosures

Dr Fan Yang (ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6707-4344>) is a Research Fellow with the ARC Centre of Excellence for Decision-Making and Society, and is based at the Melbourne Law School at the University of Melbourne. Yang is an interdisciplinary researcher in media and governance, focusing on the cross-jurisdictional impact of emerging technologies. She is internationally recognised for her research on WeChat and the Chinese diaspora in Australia. Her work has been featured in TIME Magazine, BBC, The Guardian, and ABC. Yang has provided semi-public and private consultations for the Australian Electoral Commission, Electoral Commissioners in Victoria and Queensland, DFAT, Google News, Meta, and international NGOs and political think tanks. Dr Yang is employed full-time as a research fellow by the ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society based at the Melbourne Law School node. Between 2020 and 2022, her research on Chinese-language media in Australia was previously funded by Lowy Institute's Multiculturalism, Identity, and Influence Project (supported by the Australian Department of Home Affairs), and by Freedom House with support from the U.S. Department of State, the National Endowment for Democracy, and the Hurford Foundation.

Dr Robbie Fordyce (ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0244-8151>) is an ARC DECRA Fellow and a Senior Lecturer at Monash University in the Faculty of Arts where he leads the Information Nations Research Group and co-convenes the Digital Cultures Research Group. For over ten years he has studied the rules, exploits, and politics of digital technologies, with over forty publications in this area. His recent publications have addressed how our language around media risks and harms for children have changed, how platforms are extracting more information from people, and investigating electoral misinformation and disinformation patterns on Facebook, WeChat, and RedNote. Dr Fordyce is an Associate Investigator at the ARC Centre for Excellence for the Digital Child, an Affiliate Investigator for the ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society, and a grants panellist for the Australian Communication Consumer Action Network. has been awarded funding for the following projects: *Investigating artificial intelligence risks for the Australian workforce* (ARC grant DE250101553); *"Can I download a car?": Emerging consumer issues for online access, communication and sharing of 3D printer files* (ACCAN grant 1065); and *Unregulated and Segmented Dark Ads on Social Media: Consumer Education and Regulatory Options* (ACCAN grant 1613).

Dr Luke Heemsbergen (ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8600-5280>) is a Senior Lecturer at Deakin University, where he leads the faculty research group Critical Digital Interfaces and Infrastructures and is a member of the Deakin Institute of Citizenship and Globalisation. He is interested in how emerging technologies – as diverse as 3D printing, AI, and XR – change society and how society can change these

technologies. His research draws on experience serving in Canada's department of Foreign Affairs and expresses a normative desire to move quickly and mend things. Dr Heemsbergen is an Associate Investigator at the ARC Centre for Excellence for the Digital Child. His funding partners include ID Laboratory Pty Ltd, ACCAN (grant 1065 & 2023014), Insurance and Care NSW (ICARE), Department of Health (Victoria), City of Melbourne, and Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute.

RECapture Research Assistants

Dan Dai is a doctoral researcher at Queensland University of Technology's Digital Media Research Centre. Her research focuses on developing data-driven methods for large-scale social media analysis, with particular interest in Chinese platforms. She examines content and interaction networks to advance understanding of digital publics, information dynamics, and platform accountability. Beyond academia, she has worked as a digital consultant at PwC and on industry projects across government, education, and finance. Her expertise bridges media and communication with data science to support empirical research on the role of digital platforms in society.

Stevie Zhang is a writer and journalist based in Narm. They teach media and journalism at undergraduate and postgraduate levels at the University of Melbourne. Previously, Stevie was a broadcast and digital journalist at the ABC's Asia Pacific Newsroom, and associate editor at the global coalition First Draft, UTS, and RMIT FactLab, specialising in disinformation research. Stevie also edited Farrago, Australia's oldest student publication.

Mengjie Cai has a background in journalism and is now a graduate researcher at Faculty of Arts, University of Melbourne.

Sima Mohammadi is a Ph.D. candidate in Education at Deakin University. She researches generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in education and technology-enhanced learning. She has published in peer-reviewed journals. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2691-9301>